IT NEVER CAN HAPPEN AGAIN

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IT NEVER CAN HAPPEN AGAIN

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AUTHOR OF

JOSEPH VANCE, ALICE-FOR-SHORT, SOMEHOW GOOD, AND AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOR



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CHAPTER I

OF LIZARANN COUPLAND, HER FATHER AND HER FAMILY. OF HIS PREVIOUS STORY, AND LIZARANN'S BIRTH

LIZARANN COUPLAND did not know what her father's employment was; but she knew that, every morning, she saw him to the corner of Bladen Street, put his left hand on the palin's of number three, and left him to shift for himself. She was on honour not to watch him down Bladen Street, and she had a keen sense of honour. She also knew by experience that when her aunt, Mrs. Steptoe, said she would learn her a lesson she wouldn't easy forget, Mrs. Steptoe was not referring to teacher-book instruction like at school. And this lesson, Lizarann understood, would be imparted by her aunt with some blunt instrument, perhaps a slipper, in case she failed to observe her promise. She was not to go spyin' and starin' after Father no farther than where it was wrote up "Old Vatted Rum, fivepence-halfpenny" at the Green Man and Still. It was a compact, and Lizarann observed it—always running away as fast as possible to get out of reach of temptation as soon as ever her father's fingers closed on the knob of a particular low paling. It was a paling good to turn upside down over, which affirmed the territorial rights of the Green Man over a certain six-foot foreshore of pavement liable else to be claimed by the Crown, or the Authority.

Lizarann's father, James Coupland, was stone-blind, and the reason she was sent with him every morning was because he had to cross Cazenove Street, and Dartley Street, and Trott Street, before you come to pavement all the way, and it wasn't safe. As soon as you got to the Green Man, why there you were! Only like touchin' the wall, and your stick on the right, and on you kep' direck. But as to what Lizarann's father did, at some place on this side of the next bad crossing, his six-year-old daughter never could guess. All

she knew was that she was useful, and assisted towards some public object, not easily understood by a little girl, when she piloted her father to and from his starting-point of continuous pavement, as a ship through shoals and cross-currents, to the mouth of a canal. But the metaphor of Lizarann's flight when she left the ship to its captain is not an easy one. If only metaphors would not be so lob-sided!

That her father was a supplicant for public charity was a surmise that never crossed Lizarann's mind. An idea can be got of how she thought of him by any young lady who knows, for instance, that her father is in the Custom-House, but who has never seen the Custom-House, and has no idea what he does there; or even by one who, having for parent a sexton, and being kept in ignorance of his functions, conceives of him as the Archbishop of Canterbury; or more easily—to take yet another parallel—by one situated like Lizarann's little friend Bridgetticks, down a turnin' out of Trott Street, whose grandfather was in an almshouse; but who was inflated past all bearing by his livery or uniform when the old chap was out for his holiday, and Bridget was allowed to walk with him all along Trott Street and round the Park. There was no abidin' of her, struttin' about!

"My grandfather's richer than your father," said Bridgetticks, after one such occasion, "and he's got his heyesight, too."

"Fathers are better than grandfathers," said Lizarann. "Fathers goes down Bladen Street holdin' on to nuffin', and ain't they rich, neither? My father he fetches home nine shillings in coarpers. Aunt Stingy, she let Uncle Steptoe get at it, and he laid some of it out in gin." The name of this aunt, as Lizarann pronounced it, seemed to ascribe a waspish character to its owner rather than a parsimonious one.

"You lyin' little thing, how you ever can!" exclaimed Bridgetticks. This was because the daring sum of nine shillings took her aback. But on consideration another line of tactics seemed more effective. "Nine shillin's ain't nothin'," she said. "My grandfather, he's got an allowance regular, *he* has."

Lizarann paused before replying. She was confronted with an unforeseen thing, foreign to human experience. What *was* an allowance? On the whole, it would be better to keep clear of it. She changed the *venue* of the discussion. "He's dressed up, he is," she said. But she spoke with diffidence, too, and her friend felt conciliated.

"Dressed up's a falsehood," she said, but without asperity. "If you'd 'a said cloze like the Lord Mayor's Show, now! But

little infant-school pippings like you don't know nothink." Lizarann felt put upon her mettle.

"My father," she said, "he's got a board with wrote upon. Hangs it round his neck, he does. Like on Harthurses carts and the milk."

"You never see it on his neck, not yet you can't read. You can't read the words on Arthurses cart." But Lizarann could read one—the middle one—and did it, a syllable at a time: "Prov-i-ded." It was correct, and a triumph for the decipherer. But she was doomed to humiliation. Bridgetticks was a great reader, like Buckle, and could read what was wrote on milk-carts all through.

"Any little biby could read *that!* You can't read 'fammy-lies,' nor yet 'dyly.' It's no use your tryin'." But Lizarann felt unhappy, and yearned for Culture, and tried very hard to read "families" and "daily" on each side of "provided," while Bridgetticks gave attention to a doll's camp on the doorstep. But "families" is very hard to read—you know it is!—and Lizarann quite forgot to put back a beautiful piece of stick-liquorice in her mouth during her efforts to master it.

Anybody would have thought, to look along Tallack Street, where this colloquy took place, that the announcement on Arthurses cart "Families provided daily" was followed out literally by Arthurs, and that that Trust or Syndicate was driving a brisk trade in the families it provided daily. To-day was a holiday at the Board school, and the whole street teemed with prams. And in every pram was one biby, or more, assimilating Arthurses milk. But they themselves had not been provided by Arthurs; merely the milk.

The prams were nearly the only vehicles in Tallack Street, which ran straight acrost from the railway-arch to the 'Igh Road, parallel-like, as you might say, to Trott Street. Even Arthurses cart wasn't a real cart, only drove by hand. A nearer approach to an ideal was the coal, which came behind a horse, and sold itself for a shillin' a hundred, more or less, accordin' as the season. The scales, they'd weigh down to twenty-eight pound, if you didn't want to have capital lying idle; but then it was a sight easier to be cheated at that, and you could always bring two coal-scuttles, and if one of 'em *was* wore through, why, a stout bit of brown paper, coverin' in the hole, and there you were! Because the dropping of fragments of coal on the pavement was not only wasteful, but giv' them boys something to aim with. Ammunition was scarce, owing to the way the road was kep'; similar, them boys took every opportunity.

There were two other vehicles that were known to Tallack Street. One came every day with a drum, and sold vegetables. The proprietor had made himself hoarse, many years since, with shouting about the freshness of his stock between the outbreaks on the drum, and, as life advanced and his lung-power declined, the drum-performances encroached on the oratory. This suited a large majority of the inhabitants, conveying a sense of Life—was, in fact, thought almost equal to the Play—by those who had been to it—and was so appreciated by Lizarann and Bridgetticks that they would petition to be allowed to stand in contact with the drum to feel the noise inside of 'em like.

The other vehicle was, however, the climax of the Joy of Living in Tallack Street, only it demanded a 'apenny a time, and you had to save up. But if you could afford it, it was rapture. How describe it? Well, it was drawed by a donkey, and went round and round and round. You yourself, and your friends, sat on truncated chairs at the end of radial spokes rotating horizontally on a hub, which played melancholy tunes, and you could tell what they were by looking, because there was the ticket of it, every time a new tune come. But the execution supplied no clue, or very little, to its identity.

Tallack Street, as you will have inferred, was a cul-de-sac, and therefore very popular as a playground with the children of the neighbourhood. It ended in a dead wall, formerly enclosing an extinct factory, which had survived the coming of the railway, by which it had been acquired, and for some reason spared; about which factory, or, rather, its remains, an understanding had been current for about a generation that it could be took on lease from the Company and adapted as workshops. The board was almost illegible, except one word "inquire," of no value apart from its sequel, which anyone who could read would have told you at once was a name and address; but as to what name and what address, it would have taken a scollard to tell that.

There came occasionally to Tallack Street a lady, who appeared to Lizarann to make her way into her Aunt Steptoe's home on insufficient pretexts. She certainly was not the sort of lady to get her shoes mended by a working cobbler in a suburban slum, and Lizarann made no pretence of understanding her. She saw very little of any of her aunt's visitors, because she was always sent, or bundled, out the moment they appeared, and only allowed in the house again after their departure.

She was interested and pleased, therefore, when this lady, who

was dressed quite beautiful, developed as a friend of Teacher, the familiar spirit of the Dale Road Schools, where this little girl was learning to sew quite beautiful. She was still more interested when she became aware that the conversation between these two ladies related to her own family. Teacher and the lady talked out quite loud close to her—as if she didn't matter, bless you!

"All the streets are not as bad as Tallack Street," said the lady. "And all the houses in Tallack Street are not so bad as that house at the end. People named Townroe, I think—awful people!"

"Do you mean Steptoe?"

"Oh yes—Steptoe. I've tried to talk to the woman, and it's perfectly useless. You can't do anything when the man's in the way. And as for him—well, you know, Adeline, when these people don't attend either church or chapel, it's simply hopeless. There's nothing to begin upon."

"The man drinks. Of course!"

"Of course! He seemed sober, though, the only time I saw him, but very sulky. Oh dear!—he *was* trying."

"What did he say?"

"He wouldn't say anything—wouldn't answer! And he said to his wife: 'You say a *something* word'—you understand, Adeline?—'you say a something word, and see if I don't smack your eye. You try it!' My daughter talked for an hour, and then he said: 'If you think you'll sedooce me into committing of myself, you'll find you're mistook. So I should think better of it, if I was you. Yours werry truly, Robert Steptoe.' Just as if he was writing a letter." Both ladies laughed, and Lizarann pricked her finger badly, and it redded all over the 'emstitch. But she couldn't understand the laugh. She was not fond of her aunt's husband; you can't love pock-marks unless they have some counterpoise in beauty of disposition. But she had a certain spirit of partisanship about her belongings, too!

"I suppose the children go to some school—Board School or something," said Teacher.

"They haven't children, thank Heaven! these people," said the outside lady. "But there's a little girl—somehow—with a father. They said she came here—at least, I suppose the 'school-house up the road' meant here."

"Then she must be here now. What was her name? Did you make out?"

"Eliza Ann something—Doubleday, I think, as near as I can recollect. No, it wasn't Doubleday. What could it have

been? . . ." And this lady tapped one hand with the other, to keep on showing how hard she was thinking.

"Was it Eliza Ann Coupland? Come here, Lizarann, and tell the lady if it was you."

Lizarann approached by instalments, in awe. She had received false impressions from the conversation—one that her uncle could write a letter, and this lady knew it. A second that her aunt's children—if any—would have been all over little sand-pits that would catch and hold the grime awful, like their father, and that therefore we ought to be thankful. A third that she was a "little girl somehow," and she had never been told that she was one somehow, only that she was a little girl.

"Are you the little girl?" said the lady.

"I don't know, miss," said Lizarann. She thought the lady seemed impatient. And whom did she mean by "they" when she said, "Oh dear!—how trying they are!"?

"Ought I to tell her to say 'My lady,' or not?" said Teacher.

"Oh, bother!" said the lady. "What does your father do, my dear? You're a nice little thing, only your mouth's too big."

Timid murmurs came from the catechumen. "What's that you say? Father goes out to work? What does father go out to work at?"

"That's impossible!" said Teacher. "Her father's blind, and she leads him about."

"I hope you're not telling stories, child, like the rest, because I like you all except your mouth. Come close here, so that I can hear you, and tell me what your father does. Only don't splutter or gabble!"

Whereupon Lizarann gave her version of her father's professional employment. She knew she was to say, if pressed on the point, that her father was "an asker," and she said it, standing first on one leg and then on the other uneasily. She had a mixture of misgiving and confidence that the statement would be sufficient; just as you or I might have felt in stating, for instance, that our father was an apparitor, or a stevedore, or a turnover-at-press. But she had absolutely no idea of the meaning of her phrases.

"What on earth does the child mean? Say it again, small person!" Thus the lady.

"A asker!" The child had the name perfectly clear, and added "Yass!"—to drive it home—with eyes of assurance standing wide open. Both ladies made her repeat it, and asked her what she meant by it; but she evidently did not know. They pondered and speculated, till on a sudden a light broke. "Is it possible she

means a *beggar?*" said Miss Fossett. Then the two of them spoke in an undertone, and Lizarann felt that her family affairs were being discussed over her head, but by creatures too great for her to take exception to, or even to interpret. Presently the lady addressed her again:

"What does he ask for, little stuffy? Yes, you may come as close as that. What does he ask for, child?"

Thereat Lizarann, in support of her family credit, said: "He took all of nine shillings in coarpers once on a time." She couldn't compete with the lady in birth and position, but she had a proper pride in her race, for all that.

The lady and Miss Fossett looked at one another, and the latter said: "It's quite possible. They do sometimes." And Lizarann felt flattered and that she had done her duty. And that when she told her father, he would certainly give her a peppermint-drop. She had a sense of an improved position as she went back to her sewing. But the two ladies went on talking about her under their breath, and she fancied they were resuming some incidents of the previous Saturday at Tallack Street. Teacher seemed to have heard something of them, and she now connected them with her pupil. As the lady ripened towards departure she became more audible.

"It only shows the truth of what I'm always saying to Sir Murgatroyd. How can you *expect* them to be any better when they have such wretched homes? Give them air and light and sanitation and things, and then talk goody to them if you like. . . . Oh dear!—I must rush. I've promised to go with Sibyl and those Inglis girls to Hurlingham this afternoon." Then the lady had a recrudescence of her perception that Lizarann was funny, for she turned round, going away, to say to Miss Fossett: "Oh dear, how funny they are! Fancy an Asker!" and, as it were, fell a little into Miss Fossett's bosom to find sympathy, afterwards kissing her, and saying, "But how good you are!" rather gushily, and making off. She did say, however, to Lizarann: "Good-bye, little person! Consider I've kissed you. I would, only it's such a sticky day."

Much of this conversation would have been quite unintelligible to the child, even if she had heard the whole of it. Her mind was not prepared to receive it, as, not having had much time to reflect since her birth, she had not noticed that her domestic life had anything exceptional about it. Extension of her social circle had not, so far, convinced her that there was anything unusual in their rows and quarrels; in fact, she was gently creeping on to a belief

that Steptoes—their inclusive name—was the rule, and the balance of the Universe the exception. But her unconsciousness of the actual was liable to inroads from without, and that day at school roused the curiosity of an inquiring mind. Lizarann asked herself for the first time whether the conditions of her home-life were really normal, and nothing better was to be looked forward to in the future. No doubt Tallack Street would have sided with the lady in the views she expressed of any one house in it, though each house would have laid claim to an exceptional character for itself. But in the case of Steptoe's its unanimity would have been impressive; for Lizarann's Uncle Steptoe he'd be in liquor as often as not, and frequently aim a stool or suchlike at his wife's head—besides language you could hear the length of the street.

It does not follow that he had no provocation. Mrs. Steptoe was a fine study of the effect of exasperating circumstances on a somewhat uncertain temper, and Lizarann conceived of the result as a typical aunt. She had married, some twelve years since, from motives difficult of analysis, a cobbler who drank, towards whom she had always professed indifference. She seemed to have based a low opinion of all mankind on an assumption that they were none on 'em much better than her husband, and most of 'em were a tidy sight worse. If so, the tidiness of the sight might have disappointed orderly, old-fashioned folk. Not that Bob Steptoe was a bad sort when he was sober. Only that was so seldom.

Now, on the Saturday evening in question, this uncle by marriage of Lizarann, having previously taken too much beer, took too much whisky, and became quarrelsome. "A man ain't always answerable, look at it how you may!" said Tallack Street. Let us hope Mr. Steptoe was not, as on this occasion he loosened three of his wife's front teeth and indented the bridge of her nose. His blind brother-in-law, returning at this moment, personally conducted by his small daughter, was unable to see, but guessed that Steptoe was under restraint by neighbours, and from mixed sounds of pain and rage and inarticulate spluttering that his wife had been the victim of his violence. Poor Jim, mad with anger, besought the restraining party only to let him get hold of his brother-in-law, and he would give him what would recall him to his memory on future occasions. Feeling the desirableness of this, they complied; and Mr. Steptoe, when, after a painful experience of the superior strength of Jim, he got his head out of Chancery, felt ill, and was conducted to bed by his wife. Of whom Lizarann afterwards reported that when she heard Uncle Bob get louder, Aunt

Stingy, she said, "You do, and I'll call Jim back again," and then Uncle Bob he shut up.

This little girl's father had been in the Merchant Service and had lost his eyesight through an explosion of petroleum in the harbour at Cape Town. Current belief held that it was his own fault, saying that Jim Coupland hadn't any call to drop a lighted match into a hole in an oil-cask that was standing in the January sun; still less was it necessary that he should look after it through the hole, and receive the full blast of the inevitable explosion in his face. He admitted these facts, but maintained that a hundred oil-casks might have exploded in his face, and no harm done, if he had not, a few days before, seen the Flying Dutchman. This belief could not be shaken by argument, not even by the fact that the other men on his watch, all of whom had seen the Phantom Ship, had retained their eyesight intact. Didn't old Sam Nuttall—and nobody could pretend he hadn't been forty years in the Navy—say the very first thing of all, when he told him he'd seen the Dutchman: "Look you here, my son," he said, "you've got to look sharp and get yourself hanged or shot or drownded, if you want to die with eyes in your head"? And warn't he right? Anyhow, the coincidence of the accident a few days later had created a firm faith in the mind of Jim Coupland, and very few had the heart to try to shake it.

Whatever the cause, Jim Coupland came back eyeless from that voyage, and found his wife lately delivered of a female infant that did well, and became Lizarann. But her mother did ill, presumably, and the doctor that attended her did certainly, if the verdict of Tallack Street was warranted. She had no call to die, said Tallack Street. Perhaps its many matrons did not allow enough for the hideous shock of poor eyeless Jim's reappearance. She *did* die, and poor Jim, the happy bridegroom of a year ago, was left a widower at eight-and-twenty, hopelessly blind, with a baby he could never see.

Oh the tragedies Life's records have to show, that remain unpublished, and must do so!—all but a chance one or two, such as this one just outlined.

Lizarann was named after the ship her father made his last voyage in, or almost after it. The ship was the *Anne Eliza,* and the parson got the name wrong. Jim said it wasn't any odds, that he could reckon; and Mrs. Steptoe, his sister, said, on the contrary, it ran easier, took that way. So Lizarann she became, and Lizarann she remained. And the tale how father lost his eyesight through seeing the Flying Dutchman was the ever-present Romance

of her youth, and would constantly creep into her conversation, even when the subject-matter thereof was already interesting—as, for instance, when she was discussing with Bridgetticks an expected, or perhaps we should say proposed, addition to the family of Lizarann's doll, which had been fixed for the ensuing Sunday. There could be no doubt—as there is usually in the case of human parents—about the exact hour of arrival, as the Baby was ready dressed for the event her intended mother was looking forward to, in hypothetical retirement, on the house-doorstep. She and her friend were comparing notes on previous events of a like nature.

"Oh, you story!" said Lizarann, but not offensively—it was only current chat. "My father *says* I understand. He says I understand ship's victuals and port and starboard." Grasp of these involved proficiency in other departments of thought, so the implication seemed to run. But Bridget wouldn't have it so.

"Ya'ar little silly!" she said, standing on the parapidge, and hanging to the riling, so as to project backwards into the little forecourt; you couldn't, speakin' accurately, call it a garden, but it had the feelin' about it, too. "Ya'ar little silly Simplicity Sairah in a track! Ship's victuals ain't nothing to understand, nor yet port and starboard! Wait till you can understand fly-wheels and substraction engines! *They'll* make you sit up and talk!" This little girl's father was an engineer in charge of a steam-roller.

Bridget would have said the exact reverse if the two excursions into the relative fields of knowledge had been exchanged between them. Lizarann respected her friend too much to conceive of her as a time-server, and her mind cast about to fortify her position on other lines.

"My father he says I can understand the Flying Dutchman, and he seen her. Yass! Afore ever he lost his heyesight!"

"He's lyin', then. Dutchmen ain't women. I seen a picter-Dutchman in trowsers." Lizarann cogitated gravely on this before she answered. "A ship's a her," she then said. "All ships is hers." She then added, but not as a saddening fact, merely as a thing true and noticeable, "He never seen me, father didn't."

CHAPTER II

OF JIM'S MATCH-SELLING, AND HOW HE CAME TO TAKE TO IT. HOW HE WALKED HOME WITH LIZARANN

CAN anyone among us whose life is full of action, with Hope in his heart and Achievement on his horizon; whose pillow whispers at night afterthoughts of a fruitful day, and on the day that follows can, without affectation, reproach the head that lies too long on it with having lost something precious that cannot be regained—can such a one conceive the meaning of blind or crippled life, that left Hope dead by the roadside long ago, and dares not look ahead to see the barren land; whose pillow speaks no word about the past, but only welcome hints about oblivion, and a question with the daylight—why rise? Why rise, indeed, and maybe miss a dream of a bygone day? Better lie still, and thank God for the dream-world!

"I wonder what that poor devil feels like," said one first-class traveller outside the railway-station to another, who, like himself, gave the impression that he had plenty of luggage somewhere else, which was being well looked after by a servant whose wages were too high. Both were young men, well under twenty-five at a guess; and though one was fair and the other was dark, and they were not the same height, and their features were not alike, still the predominant force of their class-identity was so strong that individuality was lost in it, and most folk, seeing them *en passant* would have spoken of them thenceforth as "those two young swells," and dismissed them with an impression that either might be at any time substituted for the other without any great violence to contemporary history. They appeared to be sauntering to the train, and the poor devil was Jim Coupland, at his usual post by the long blank wall he used to feel his way down, after leaving Lizarann at the corner she might not pass. The wonderer had bought matches of Jim that he didn't want—for Jim was obliged to make a show of selling matches, to be within the law—and had returned change for sixpence, honourably offered by Jim. "I can't see you, master," said the blind man, "and I never shall, not if the sky falls, but I thank ye kindly. And I'll tell my little lass on ye, home to-

night." It was the only recompense Jim had to offer, and he offered it.

"*I* should kill myself straight off," said the other traveller. His speech was quite as consequent on his friend's as most current speech is on its antecedent; you listen closely when you hear talk, and see if this is not the case! "Stop a bit! Don't make me split this cigar. I haven't got another, and nothing fit to smoke is procurable in this neighbourhood . . . there!—that's right, now. . . . The little chocket wouldn't snickle out. Let's see! What topic were we giving our powerful brains to? Oh, ah!—the blind beggar. You recollect the fellah?"

"Never saw him before, that I know of."

"Perhaps you haven't. I have. But you remember the two little girls?"

"Which two?"

"That morning we went to inquire about the railroad arch. Of course, you remember." His friend assented. "Well!—that little girl is this chap's kid. She'll come in the evening to take him home. I've seen 'em about together, many a time."

"I remember two little girls, where we went down that street my mother and sister slum in. Tallack Street. Which was the kid? The bony one with the nostril ajar, and the front teeth, that called you a cure?"

"No—the little plummy modest one, with both eyes stood open, and something to suck. Large dark eyes." No really nice young man, such as we like, can ever mention a girl's eyes, even a young child's, without a shade of tenderness.

"What a sensitive youth you are, Scipio!" His friend sees through him. "The other was a little Jezebel."

"Came out of Termagant's egg, I should say. Isn't there a bird called a Termagant? There ought to be."

"I quite agree, but I doubt it. Well—to return to the point—you say you would kill yourself, straight off. How do you know that? You think you would now, but you wouldn't when it came to the scratch. This man doesn't want to kill himself."

"Because of the little girl. He'd kill himself fast enough if he had nothing to live for."

"My dear Scipio, that is sheer *petitio principii*. A man's having no wish at all to live takes his wish to die for granted. Unless he has an unnatural taste for mere equilibrium for its own sake. But the real point is that if you were this chap, you would have exactly the same inducements to live that he has—the little girl, for instance."

"Be calm, William! Allow me to point out that you are begging the question yourself. The hypothetical form—'If you were this chap'—if interpreted to imply an exchange of identity in all particulars, takes for granted that what this chap does now I should do then. Clearly, I shouldn't kill myself, or shouldn't have done so up to date, as he hasn't. But the meaning of my remark is obvious to any mind not warped and distorted by casuistry. I refer more particularly to your own. Its meaning is that if I had two scabs instead of eyes, and was reduced to flattering the vanity of my fellow-countrymen in order to stimulate their liberality, I should by preference select Euthanasia." And he lighted his cigar, which had been waiting.

"I wish that little girl was here now, to call you a 'cure' again, Scipio. She did you a lot of good."

Jim Coupland heard as far as "I should kill myself straight off," which he certainly was not meant to do by the speakers. But neither of them were on their guard against the quickened hearing of the blind, and neither of them heard that Jim answered, though each had an impression the blind man was talking to himself. As for Jim, *his* impression was that his words reached. But then he had no means of knowing how far off the young men were, and that, as against the shrewdness of his own hearing, they were little better than deaf at that distance. What he said was:

"I was minded to, young Master, at the first go off. But the wish was on me strong for the voice of my wife, and the lips of her. And when I lost her—ye understand—it was the cry of the baby new-born that held me. I'd be shamed to think upon it now, young Master. The day's bound to go by, and I mean to bide it out."

"Who are you lecterin' to? Polly—pretty Polly!" Thus an unfeeling fiend of a boy, who hears poor Jim talking to the empty air. But Jim, if he hears, does not heed him. His mind is far away, thinking of the dreadful day of his return to his wife and her week-old baby, and his coming to know that his mishap, announced by letter the day before, had been kept from her, and was still to tell. Of the ill-judged attempt to keep it from her yet a while, and let him be beside her in the half-dark. And the fatal sudden light of a fire that blazed out, and her cry of terror: "Oh, Jim, man, what have you done to your eyes?" . . .

Then of yet one more forlorn hope—the ill-wrought, ill-sustained pretext that this was but a passing cloud, a mere drawback of the hour, a thing that time would remedy—so ill-sustained that even

in the few short days before her death Jim's wife had come to know that his eyes, stone-blind beyond a doubt, would never laugh into her face again, would never rest with hers upon the little face she longed to show him was so like his own. And then the end, and a grave in the parish burial-ground he could not see.

Then of a dream of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and of a child's cry that reached him and called him back, even as he longed of his own free choice and will to plunge into its utter darkness. Then of a growth of ease—a sort of working ease to get through life with—and a term of reading, day by day, hour by hour, each tiniest change in the inflection of the baby's cry, until one day Lizarann, to whom it had occurred to glance round at the Universe she had been pitchforked into, burst into a not very well executed laugh at its expense, and made poor Jim for the first time fully conscious that he had a daughter.

It would be hard to tell all the struggles he went through before he could reconcile himself to a new position in life, mendicancy under pretence of match-selling. He did it at last, urged by grim necessity and Mrs. Steptoe. Perhaps we should say *stung* by the latter rather than *urged,* for her attitude was that, eyes or no eyes, if her brother wasn't going to do a hand's turn for himself, he might pack up his traps and go, brat and all! Who was he that he was to eat his sister out of house and home? And all because he was too proud to beg, forsooth! Wasn't he begging already, and wasn't she alms-giving? Yes!—only it was to be all underhanded! Nothing fair or above-board! Why should he be ashamed to ask the public for what he wasn't ashamed to take from two toiling relatives, the weaker of whom had suffered so much already from the disgusting drinking habits of the other? Jim gave way, and found excuses for his sister—he always did—in these same disgusting habits. Perhaps he was right. Anyhow, he gave way. And an old mate of his faked him up the inscription afore-mentioned, and supplied the picture of the Flying Dutchman from his narrative of the incident. And well Jim remembered how the cord he hung it from his neck by got frayed and broke, and brought back to his mind another cord his hand once grasped, as he swayed to and fro at the weather ear-ring of a topsail; and his wondering—would the frayed strands of the sheet hold under the great strain of his back-draw, or snap and fall with him into the black gulf that was hungering for him below? He could hear again the music of the gale that sang in the shrouds, feel again the downward plunge of the hull into the trough of the sea, and breathe again the air that bore its flying foam. Then he thought

to himself, would not a plunge into that black gulf, then and there, have been, after all, the best thing for him? And answered his own thought without noting a strangeness in its wording: "What!—and never seen my little lass!"

But the happy fancy that Jim did not beg, but only asked, took hold of the imagination. Of course he would not beg—he would scorn to do so—he, the strong seaman, who had lived a life of danger half of those whose footsteps passed him daily would have flinched to think of! Why should he hesitate to ask of them what he would have given so freely to any one of them himself—to any one of them left in the dark? So when Lizarann said to him one day, apropos of the fact that people's fathers were their aunt's brothers, "Bridgettickses brother's a 'Orsekeeper. Are you a 'Orsekeeper?" He replied that he wasn't, exactly. But he was an Asker, to *be* sure! And the child, catching a sort of resemblance between the words, remembered it. And, referring to her Aunt Steptoe, got it confirmed. It served as a barrier for a time against an insight into the facts.

When poor Jim's speech was so brave of how the day was bound to go by and he would bide it out, was his whole heart in his utterance? Was there no reserve—no suppressed execration of that mysterious unsolicited Cause that had stinted him down to darkness after a short half-time of light? At that moment he was conscious of none—a moment when he felt the world about him—heard the voices of his fellow-men—felt on his face, without shrinking, the full stress of the mid-day sun, whose rays he should never see again. But how about the darkness of the night, that he had learned to know only by the loneliness and the silence? In its solitude was it not now and again almost his resolve to die, and not await another day? Almost, yes!—but never quite. Always a decision to hear just once again the voice of his little lass in the morning. If it were only this once, and he should fail in strength to bear that other day; still, let it be, for now! Just once again!

But the longest nights led each to its dawn, and poor Jim knew of each dawn by hearsay, and started off early, on all days weather forbade not too grossly, hold of Lizarann's 'and, and takin' good care not to crost only when other parties done the same, actual-like, so you might place reliance, and not get under the 'orses' 'oofs; and throughout each day that followed Jim treasured the anticipation of its end, and looked forward to the coming of his little lass to take him home. He would sit and think of what her small hand would feel like in his when the welcome hour should come for his departure; and each day as that hour came, and he

found his way back to Vatted Rum Corner to wait for her, came also a short spell of tense anxiety lest he should not hear her voice this time. And then the relief, when he caught the signal he had taught her, through the noise of the traffic and the railway-whistles near at hand.

"Ye shouldn't sing out *Poy*lot, little lass," said he, when she turned up at the end of that day—the day of the two young men and the sixpence. "Ye should say Pie-lott. Else ye might be anyone else's little lass, not Father Jim's."

"I *ain't*," said Lizarann resolutely. "I'm Father Jim's. Pi-lot!" She threw her soul into a reproduction of her father's articulation.

"Nor yet you've no need to lose your front teeth over it. Easy does it in the end. Now again! Pi-lot!" Whereupon Lizarann repeated the word with self-restraint, and received approval. "Not for to tear up the paving-stones, lassie," added her father, explanatorily.

"What was that young varmint a-saying?" he asked, as they started to return home. He was referring to words overheard—winged words that had passed between his daughter and a boy. It was the same boy that had called him Pretty Poll, who had followed him to the street-corner; and had then gone on to greet Lizarann with the report that her Daddy was waiting to give her "what-for," for being late—which she wasn't.

Probably he was the worst boy in existence—at least, Lizarann thought he was. She was too young to appreciate his only virtue, a total absence of hypocrisy.

"Saying as it was *your* eyes as was out, and it didn't hurt *him*." Jim seemed mightily amused.

"What did you say to him over that, little lass?" said he.

"Didn't say nuffint!" And, indeed, Lizarann had not seen her way to quarrelling with two such obvious truths.

"What else was he a-saying? He said a bit more than that. I could hear him giving it mouth."

"Sayin' he'd four nuts he hadn't ate, and me to guess which 'and they was in beyont his back for a 'apenny." Lizarann then explained the proposed deal at some length.

"He's a nice young sportin' charackter! Thimble-rigging isn't in it. Why, lassie, if you *had* guessed right, he'd just have swopped 'em across, and took your ha'penny. He wants attendin' to with a rope's end, he does—wants his trousers spilin'. His mother she sells the fried eels and winkles, next door against the little shop where I"—Jim hesitated a minute—"where I get my

shaving-soap." For Jim remembered in time that his connection with this shop was not to come to his child's ears. His board was to be kept in the background.

Lizarann wanted badly to frame a question about this boy. Were all boys nefarious whose mothers sold fried eels and winkles? And if so, had this one acquired a low moral tone by contact with fried fish, or had his parent's humble walk in life resulted from his depravity? Lizarann gave up the idea of asking this question. It was too complex. But she could get information about the barber's shop. She approached the subject indirectly.

"Bridgetticks she can read what's wrote up on shaving-shops."

"What can she read on 'em, little lass?"

"She can read Easy Shaving Twopence. And Hegg-Shampoo Fourpence. And Fresh Water Every Customer. Round in the winder in Cazenove Street."

"Brayvo, Bridgetticks! But my little lass she's going to read ever so well as Bridgetticks—ah! and a fat lot better. And larn manners belike, as well!"

"Bridgetticks said she'd learn Simpson's boy manners. Down the yard where there's a dog killed his sister's cat." Lizarann spoke evidently with some idea of joining the class. But her father had other views.

"Bridgetticks indeed! She couldn't teach manners to a biled owl, to speak of. She better give her time to studying of 'em herself. Whatever was the name she called the gentleman, lass? Tell us again."

"The long gentleman?"

"Ah!"

"She didn't call him nuffint."

"Well, then—the short gentleman."

"A Cure."

"Well!—that wasn't manners, lassie. She had ought to have called him Sir—or his name, for that matter, if she'd come by it. Couldn't she say his name with Mister? In course she could, only she didn't know it."

Lizarann stopped and stood nodding on the pavement. "Bridgetticks, she knowed his name—the short one," she said. "Because the tall gentleman, he called it him." Then the two went on again, Jim having reclaimed the hand he had let go for a moment to confirm a strange quick perception of the child's emphatic nods by touching her head.

"What was the name of the short one the tall gentleman called him by?" he asked. This was not merely to make conversation.

Jim had fancied he caught a familiar sound in the name one of his young swells of the morning had applied to the other. He had not heard their reference to Tallack Street. Had he done so, he would at once have identified them as the subjects of a narrative of Lizarann's some days since. She now offered an imperfect version of the name, and Jim at once caught the connection. He *had* heard the name Scipio—used by the young man when he gave him his sixpence for a box of Vesuvians.

"Sippy-oh—was that it?" said he. "Well, that's a queer start too. I've seen your two gentlemen, little lass, only this morning. One of 'em, he planked down a tanner for one box. Not Sippy-oh—t'other young master. What were the two of 'em doing again down in Tallack Street?"

Lizarann braced herself for her narrative by drawing a long breath and standing with her eyes very wide open, then plunged *in medias res* with an oppressive sense of responsibility for historical truth, but without punctuation. She pooled all her stops, however, and by throwing in a handful at long intervals gave her lungs an opportunity of expanding.

"They was two gentleman in one hansom and I seen 'em through the open winder and Aunt Stingy she shet the winder and Bridgetticks she come lookin' in at the winder and Aunt Stingy she says I'll flat your nose for you she says an impident little hussy and she goes out for to catch hold on her and Bridgetticks she sings out Old Mother Cobblerswax and hooks it off. . . ." All the consolidated overdue stops came in here.

Jim put in a word to steady the narrative, derived from its earlier recital: "And then you got round behind your aunt, and the gentlemen were talking to the cab-driver, hey, lassie?"

Lizarann nodded at her father exactly as if he could have seen her. However, the way she said "yass" did all the work of her nod, as well as its own, and she continued with a new lease of breath: "The driver he says 'Don't see no spremises' he says, and the gentlemen they says 'Don't see no spremises' they says, and then—'Ho here's a little girl' they says all at wunst. . . ."

"And that was my little lass, warn't it, lassie? And she showed 'em where the board was up. That was the way of it, I lay. And whereabout was Bridgetticks the whilst?" Lizarann was becoming more reposeful in style, and was working round to a proper distribution of stops.

"Bridgetticks," she replied, "was in behind the palin's at 'Acker's, and was for biting Aunt Stingy if she laid 'ands. And Jimmy 'Acker's granny she come out, and 'Leave the child alone'

she says. But the two gentleman come down out of the hansom scab and said there was no spremises, but I was a nice little girl and should have a trep'ny bit. Yass!"

"And then your aunt she looked round after you, I'll go bail. Wasn't *she* in it, little lass?"

"Then Aunt Stingy she giv' over, 'cos of Jimmy 'Acker's granny, and come to see. And the tall gentleman, he needn't trouble her, he says, and she kep' a little way off. And I kep' the threp'ny bit in my mouf, I did."

"So she mightn't get it?" Lizarann nodded. "And where was Bridgetticks?"

"Over acrost, feelin' up like, 'cos of Aunt Stingy."

An image passes through Jim's mind of a powerful rodent working stealthily round, clear of its enemy, to join the colloquy, and perhaps secure another threepence. His image of Bridgetticks is not a pleasing one. He doesn't believe in her sex or her girlhood—classes her with the fiendish boy at the fish-shop, and rather wishes he could let her loose on him to run him down, as one slips a dog from a leash. She would do it.

"And how came she to cut in? It was my little lassie's cake."

But Lizarann felt hurt on her friend's account. "She giv' me two apples," she said, and left the point, as one sure to be understood. Then she continued: "The gentlemen wanted for to know our names, and Bridgetticks said not if took down. So the gentleman put the pencil away and she says Bridgetticks and I says Lizarann Toopland."

"Right you were! And then what did the gentleman say?"

"Not to shout both at once."

"Which did ye like best, little lass—which gentleman?" But the child is uncertain on this point. Being pressed, she admits a *tendresse* for the one called Scipio; but it appears that Bridgetticks has condemned him on account of his jaw, pointing to a certain sententiousness of style, which has already been in evidence in this story. Her discrimination of him as a Cure, too, will show those who are familiar with the use of this term that she placed a low value on his reflections.

Her father, having certainly spoken with these two gentlemen, felt some curiosity about what they could want in Tallack Street. His having spoken with them himself had, of course, given them an interest for him he had not felt before. But inquiry of a child not seven years old has to be conducted cautiously. If too hard pushed, she will invent. "What did ye make out they came for, lassie?" he asked.

"Spremises," was the reply, given with confidence. But this seemed ill-grounded when she added, "What does spremises mean, daddy?"

"Houses with bills in the winder, lass. Sure! But didn't they never say where they come from, nor what they wanted?"

"Bridgetticks she knew."

"Where did she say they came from?"

"Smallporks Hospital." Jim wondered how on earth Lizarann's friend had struck on this vein of invention, but he only expressed the mildest doubt of its accuracy lest he should upset his informant. As it was, he disturbed her slightly. "She ain't tellin' no lies," she added.

"P'raps it warn't so bad as all that come to, lassie. P'raps it was only Guy's or 'Tholomoo's?" But the little person was not prepared to accept any composition that threw doubt on Bridgetticks. She might have questioned her statements personally, even to the extent of calling her a story. But she felt bound to defend her, even against her father. So she nailed her colours, so to speak, to the Smallpox Hospital. That was to be the very hospital, and no other, that these two gentlemen were connected with. She gave illustrations of untruthfulness, as shown by contemporaries.

"Jimmy 'Acker he's a liar. And Uncle Steptoe he's a liar. Aunt Stingy says so. Bridgetticks she ain't. She speaks the troof, she does. Yass! She *says* so." Very open eyes and a nod.

"In coorse she does, and in coorse she knows." Then poor Jim wondered to himself what this young person was like that his little lass had such faith in. He continued: "What's she like to look at, by way of describing of her now?"

Lizarann had never described anybody, so far. That is to say, not consciously. She might have done it without knowing it was description. But she knew quite well what her father meant, and braced herself up to authorship.

"She's very 'ard, all over," she said, as a first item. "And she's awful strong. She is—yass! And she don't stick out nowhere neither." A form the reverse of *svelte* is impressed upon her hearer's inner vision. But she repents of the last item, and adds, "Only her nose!"

"What's her colour of hair—black colour?—yaller colour?"

"T'int no colour at all, Daddy."

"Just plain hair-colour—is that it?"

"Yass! Pline hair-colour."

"What's her eyes?" But this is too difficult. Lizarann gives it up. To say plain eye-colour would be poor and unoriginal. How-

ever, particulars could be given of Bridgettickses eyes, apart from questions of their colour.

"She can squint, she can. Yass—acrost!"

"She don't want to it—not she!"

"Don't she want to it, Daddy?" A timid expression of doubt this. "I said—I said—to Bridgetticks . . ."

"Hurry up, little lass! What was it ye said?"

"I said—to Bridgetticks—I said the boys said she couldn't be off of it, they did. That's what the boys said."

"And she said *they* was liars, I'll go bail. Hay, little lass?"

"She said they was liars. Yass!" And then the difficulties of negotiating the passage across Cazenove Street, where they had by this time arrived, stopped the conversation.

When the couple were safely landed on the opposite pavement, talk went on again. Jim's image of Bridgetticks had not been improved by Lizarann's description. And an incident of her narrative had caused him to picture to himself a terrifying vision of her.

"She must have looked a queer un, lassie, flattening her nose against the winder-pane."

"Aunt Stingy said she'd welt her down fine if she could once catch holt."

"Your aunt don't seem to have thought her a beauty. Not with her nose against the glass! What did you think yourself, lassie?"

"I didn't seen her." Her head shook a long continuous negative.

"How do ye make that out, lass?"

"We ply at bein' oarposite sides of the winder-pine. Her outside—me in!"

"Well, then—o' course you *saw* her, lassie. You've got eyes in your head."

"I was a-flotting of my own nose against the glast, inside, too clost to see. Right oarposite—yass!" And then explained, at some expense of words, that this gyme, or game, was played by two little girls, or little boys, or a sample of each, jamming their noses one against the other as it were with the cold, unpleasant glass between. The gratification of doing this, whatever it was, might be enhanced and intensified by a similar treatment of their tongue-tips. This last variation caused Lizarann to end up with: "Outside tistés of rine. Inside tistés of cleanin' windows."

"I don't see no kissin' to be got out of that," said Jim. But the inventors of this game had evidently never anticipated its adoption by grown-up persons, and did not advise it. *Their* low natures

could not enter into it. It was, however, made clear why Bridget-ticks was invisible during an innings—if the term is permissible.

But oh, to think of it! Poor Jim had never seen his little lass, whose chatter had supplied him with a vivid image—albeit, perhaps, a false one—of her friend of ten years old. Her voice and touch were all he had to live for; but the only image of her he could get was from a grudging admission of his sister's that she might grow to be like her mother in time, but she would never have her looks. These looks were only admitted by Mrs. Steptoe for strategic purposes—videlicet, the cheapening of her brother's one possession and emphasizing of his losses. She may have had no defined intention of giving him pain, but the attitude of thought implied formed part of a scheme of Jeremiads her life was devoted to fostering and maturing. The looks of Lizarann's mother were the only pivot on which discussion of the child's own could turn naturally and easily. The embittered and unsympathetic disposition of her aunt made communication about them on other lines difficult or impossible to poor Jim.

But he treasured in his heart the idea that one day he would meet with some congenial soul whom he could take into his confidence, and petition for a description of what his little lass was really like. Unless, indeed, when she grew older, she was able to tell him what her image in a mirror resembled better than she had done when once or twice he had tried that way of eliciting information. For on those occasions Lizarann had at first shown symptoms of becoming what her aunt called a little giggling, affected chit, and had only been able to report that she looked "like Lyzaraan in the glast," and then had grown uneasy, betrayed a tendency towards panic, and hid her face on her father when he became earnest, and begged her for his sake to tell him what she really looked like. She couldn't understand it at all, and may have had misgivings that she was being entrapped into some sort of ritual of a Masonic nature. So Jim had to wait for enlightenment from herself, and looked forward to the day when she should become more old and serious. Meanwhile what would he not have given for one little glimmer to help his imperfect image of what his little lass was like, now—now that her childhood was there?

But the darkness was upon him for all time. And the world that once was his to see had vanished—vanished with the last image his eyes had known; the quay at Cape Town in the blazing sun, the Dutch-built houses on the hot hill-side, and Table Mountain dark against the sky; and all the wide sea, a blaze of white

beneath the blue, whose strongest glare might never reach his cancelled sight again. And there—so Jim believed, on the strength of a legend his informant may have invented on the spot—when the winds were at their worst round the Cape of Storms, might still be seen the source of all his evil, the Phantom Ship that had blasted his eyesight and made him what he had become. So fixed was this article of Jim's faith that it is not exaggeration to say that he drew comfort from the unending doom of her shadowy crew. Come what might to him, he always had this consolation, that as long as the sea should last, there was no hope of rest for the soul of the Flying Dutchman. It was something, if it wasn't much; and he told and retold the tale to his little lass, who was grieved on his behalf; but had somewhere, in the unrevengeful background of her mind, a chance thought of pity now and again for the unhappy seaman who was the cause of his misfortune.

CHAPTER III

OF ROYD HALL, AND ITS LITERARY GUEST WHO HAD AN IMPOSSIBLE WIFE

The lady who had shown an interest in Lizarann at the Dale Road Schools was the wife of Sir Murgatroyd Arkroyd, of Royal in Rankshire and Drum in Banffshire, and even more places. The young man who had bought Jim's matches and returned his change was their eldest son, William Rufus Arkroyd. His friend, whom he called Scipio, who was his college chum at Cambridge a year or so since, and had remained his inseparable companion, was on this particular day starting with him to pay an autumn visit to his paternal mansion, Royd Hall, about seven miles from Grime, where the new Translucent Cast Steel Foundries are.

The two young men got a carriage to themselves, and played picquet all the way to Furnivals, the little station where you get out for Royd and Thanes Castle, and the omnibus meets you. Because you are the sort probably that omnibuses meet. And it may be considered to have met William Rufus and Scipio on this occasion, but only platonically; for they rode to the house in a dog-cart that awaited them. However, the omnibus had the consolation of being ridden in by Mr. Arkroyd's man Schott, who came on in it with such luggage as would not go under a seat amenable only to card-cases or the like.

The model groom, Bullett, who had driven the trap to the station, had just time to establish himself on the back-seat, when the model mare was off at a spin, and an agricultural population, whose convictions and diet changed very little since the days of William the Norman, were abasing themselves in a humiliating manner unworthy of the age we live in—uncovering male heads and bobbing female skirts—at the doors of cottages whose hygienic arrangements were a disgrace to a Christian country and a reflection on civilization. So said the *Grime Sentinel*, in an editorial; and, as it spoke as though the editor had tried all these arrangements and found them wanting, no doubt it was right.

"Now, what have you and my affectionate brother been talking about all the way here?" Thus Judith, the sister of the one she is not addressing.

Scipio replies at leisure. He is evidently accustomed to being patronized by this handsome and self-possessed young lady, who is two years his senior, and speaks as to a junior. But, though she patronizes him, she waits until he chooses to answer.

"Your affectionate brother and myself, Miss Arkroyd, are so accustomed to each other's society, after a long residence in college together, that it is only on rare and special occasions that we exchange any remarks at all. We agreed some time since that the edge of conversation—that, I believe, was the expression—was taken off when each of the parties to it is always definitely certain what the other is going to say."

"Nonsense!—ridiculous boy! Do you expect me to believe that you two rode all that way and never spoke?"

Scipio reconsiders, and takes exception to his own speech, with the air of a person drawing on a reserve of veracity, a higher candour: "Perhaps I have overstated the case. We played picquet all the way from Euston. Picquet, as you are aware, involves an occasional interchange of monosyllables. . . ."

"I know. One for his heels and two for his nob. Go on."

"Excuse me. Allow me to correct a misapprehension. The expressions you have quoted belong to another game—cribbage."

"Does it matter? Do go on with what you were saying . . . 'involves an occasional interchange of monosyllables' . . ." The young lady is a little impatient, and taps.

"Which can scarcely be regarded as conversation." He completes the sentence with deliberation. He seems to take a pleasure in doing so, simply because of her impatience. "But with the exception of allusions to the game, I can recall no remark or observation whatever, wise or otherwise."

Whereupon the young lady, seeming to give him up as hopeless, calls to her brother in an adjoining room: "Will!" and he replies: "What? Anything wanted?"

"Yes!—come and make Lord Felixthorpe reasonable." From which it is clear that Scipio is a lord, or has a right to be called one. He is somebody's son, supposably.

This conversation is taking place in the drawing-room at Royd, where the two young men arrived just in time to delay dinner half-an-hour, that they might have time to dress. At Royd, undue hurry about anything was unknown, and Mr. Schott had arranged young Mr. Arkroyd's shirt-studs in his shirt, black silk stockings, coat, waistcoat, and trousers in a most beautiful pattern on his bed almost before his apologies to his mother were over for giving the wrong time of his train. He ought to have arrived an hour

sooner, and Bullett and the dog-cart—or, rather, its mare—had been kicking their heels all that time at Furnival Station, enjoying the great luxury of enforced idleness, with a grievance against its cause. However, it was all right by now, and everyone who had not eaten too many macaroons at tea had dined extremely well.

"Smoke a cigarette," said William Rufus to his sister, as he settled down on the split fauteuil. "Never mind Sibyl!" She disclaimed Sibyl's influence, and lighted the cigarette he gave her at his own. He continued: "*I* can't make Scip reasonable. Nobody can."

"He says you and he never exchanged a word, and that you played cribbage in the train all the way without speaking."

"It was picquet. I don't know cribbage."

"Oh dear!—how trying you boys are! As if that mattered! The *point* is, did you speak, or didn't you?"

Whereupon each of the young men looked at the other, and said: "Did we speak, or didn't we?"

"I can wait," said the young lady; and waited with a passiveness that had all the force of activity.

"I understand"—thus Scipio, more deliberately than ever—"that technical remarks relating to the game are excluded by hypothesis."

"Yes!" from the catechist.

"Stop a bit, Scip. We did speak. We spoke about the blind beggar."

"I knew you were talking nonsense. You talked all the way. But who was the blind beggar?"

"A friend of Scip's—at least, a father of one of his young ladies."

Miss Arkroyd looked amused more than curious. "You haven't told us of this one," said she. "Or have you?"

"I have had nothing official to communicate, so far. Possibly a mere passing *tendresse*. I have only known the young lady a very short time. I will promise further information as soon as there is anything to communicate."

Miss Arkroyd continued to look at the speaker as though to find out his real meaning, half in doubt, half taking him *au sérieux*. But her brother struck in, saying: "Nothing interesting, Judith. This one's too young, and might be unsuitable from other points of view—eh, Scip?"

"The family connection," Scipio answers reflectively, "may have drawbacks. Nevertheless, I find, when I indulge in the position, hypothetically, of a son-in-law, that I do not shrink from the image

of the relation I have created. It has a sort of sense about it of the starboard watch, and keeping a good look-out on foc'sles, and knowing how to splice cables. By-the-by, Will, this is an accomplishment that might prove useful in my family—splicing cables, I mean. I am certain that we can't, at present, any of us. Even my half-brother, though his grandfather—on his mother's side—is an Admiral, cannot splice a cable . . ."

"Never mind the cables! Go on about the blind beggar."

Her brother, as one who knows his friend's disposition to wander, supplies consecutive narrative: "The blind beggar's that sailor at the railway. Most likely you've seen him. . . . No?"—replying to a disclaiming headshake.—"Well!—take him for granted. The child's his child."

"What child?"

"You've seen her yourself, I think; or the same thing—the *madre* has. *You* remember?—in that Tallack Street place, on the Remunerative Artisans' Domicile Company's estate. You told us of it yourself, you know."

"I know Tallack Street perfectly well. It's the place where there was land for a factory that I thought would do for the New Idea. Have you seen it?"

"Why, of course! Scip and I went over next day. Well—it's that little girl." But Judith has slummed so many little girls in Tallack Street, all alike, that she can't recall any special one. She remembers the front teeth of one very plainly. Her brother also remembers Bridgetticks—not a young lady easily forgotten, clearly. But he has forgotten her name.

"Yes, I know her. So does Scip. She called him a Cure. But not that one—a younger child. I rather think our mother knows something about her." He leans his head well back towards his mother in the next room—sees its ceiling, perhaps, as he blows his cigarette-smoke straight upwards—and calls to her, "Madre!" The Italian word may be some mere family habit, without reason. A perceptive guest in the next room makes a mental note of it as a useful point in his next novel. For he is a literary celebrity. Lady Arkroyd answers: "Yes, dear, what?" She looks quite round the high back of the chair she sits in, and speaks fairly towards her son. He continues to throw his voice back over his head to her:

"What was the name of the queer kid that said her father was 'an Asker'? You told us about her, you know. . . . At the school place, down by Tallack Street. . . ."

"I know. Her father's blind, and she leads him about. Be

quiet, and don't ask, and perhaps I shall remember the name." Lady Arkroyd shuts her eyes over the job and waits on Memory. It may take time. Her son decides that he can listen just as well with his head down, and becomes normal. Presently his mother reports: "I think it was Steptoe—no!—not Steptoe. Eliza Ann Copeland, Adeline Fossett's schoolroom." If you look back to where Lizarann made this lady's acquaintance, you will see that there was underlying method in the seeming-disjointed action of her memory.

Her son replies, "Yes—that child"; and adds, "All right—that'll do," meaning that he has now got all the information wanted for the moment. So the perceptive guest infers, and listens with interest for the use he is going to make of it. But he loses the thread of the conversation; for, just as he is going to speak, the sister says to Scipio, "What did you say 'er' for?"—meaning, why did you begin and stop?

"The expression," his lordship replies with intense deliberation, "was an involuntary prefix to a statement I was preparing to make concerning the patronymic of the little girl who——" He stops dead on the pronoun, without finishing the sentence; then continues: "I need go no farther, especially as I foresee a fresh confirmation forming on the lips of my dear friend William Rufus of the view taken of my personal character by the other little-girl-who. But perhaps the name of the first little-girl-who may be taken as decided on. In that case I need not adduce my evidence."

"Do shut up, Scip," is the comment of William Rufus. "The other little girl spoke the truth. You *are* a Cure—not the least doubt of it."

"What *is* a Cure?" says Judith. "I don't know. But please don't shut up; never mind Will! What was it you were going to say?"

"Merely this:—When your intractable brother and myself visited Tallack Street, having previously interviewed Mr. Illingworth, the courteous secretary of the Remunerative . . ."

"*Do* get along, Scip!" from Mr. Arkroyd.

"My dear Will, I assure you that your impatience only defeats its own object. If you will balance the time gained by skipping passages in my statement—which may in the end prove essential to the context—against the time lost in administering verbal stimulus to the speaker, you will find—if I am not mistaken—that the latter exceeds the former."

"All right, old chap! I give up. Go ahead!"

"I shall have to go and talk to the new visitors. You had better get on." These speeches come simultaneously from his two hearers; the last speaker with her fine eyes fixed on a wrist-watch, little larger than the iris of either. Scipio accelerates with docility.

"After getting the particulars of the land and buildings from Illingworth, we drove round by Tallack Street to look at the site. We always make a point of seeing everything. Illingworth was not justified in saying that a small shed on the land, in the last stages of disintegration, could be utilized for a motor-garage . . . but never mind that! We are at present concerned with the name of the little-girl-who. The plummy little dark-eyed one, Will—not that shrill little fiend. Well!—when we arrived at Tallack Street, and could see nothing the least resembling a suitable site for a factory—or, indeed, anything else—your accomplished brother, Miss Arkroyd, who cannot get in or out of a hansom without breaking his knee-caps, urged upon me the propriety of descending and inquiring at the Robin Hood. The Robin Hood was congenial to me—the sort of pub I always frequent when I have a choice. It had a picture of Robin dressed like a member of what I always suppose to be a benefit-club, which extends to me, when I sit at windows, a long pole with a collection-box, suggesting an inversion of the way we fed bears in our youth. . . ." His hearers become restive.

"This is irrelevant," says the brother. And the sister looked again at her wrist.

"I am aware of it. I will not detain Miss Arkroyd long at the Robin Hood. I will merely note the fact that it had a water-trough for horses, and a space in front—it is in the main road, just as you reach Tallack Street—and that it is a House of Call for Plasterers. I mention this in case . . ."

"In case any of us should plaster unexpectedly? Do you feel that you wish to plaster, Will?"

"I might. Sibyl probably will, sooner or later. Go on, Scip. . . . Yes, we interrupted you—admitted! . . . Now go on."

"In the private bar of the Robin Hood—for it boasts a public and private bar, though it stops short of making parade of a saloon bar—I encountered a cobbler drinking a tumblerful of spirits. He was becoming a cobblerful of tumblerfuls. . . ."

"I'm sure I know that man," Judith says, in brackets. "It was the one that said he was 'mine very truly, Robert Steptoe.' Never mind!—go on. . . ."

"But he was not too drunk to tell me that if I kept my eyes

open I should see a blooming board at the end of the street. There wasn't any too much reading on it now, the boys having aimed at it successfully ever since he came to Rose Cottage—'ouse on the right—but he took it a board was always a board, reading or no. I could see for myself, by looking. It warn't trespassers; he knew that. . . . Do not be impatient. I am coming to the gist of my communication. . . . Shortly after leaving the bar of the Robin Hood, I heard some boys singing a monotonous chant. A name was frequently repeated in it; it sounded like:

'Lizarann Coupland's
Father begs for 'apence
Just round the corner
Down by the gasworks. . . .'

And so on over and over again. I inquired of one small boy *whose* father it was that begged for halfpence, but he turned the conversation, and suggested that I should give him a farden kike. However, another one repeated the name gratis; and though he was too young to be quite intelligible I was satisfied that the name was Eliza Ann Copeland or Coupland."

"Why couldn't you tell us that straight off, Lord Felixthorpe?" says Judith. To which the narrator replies with a sweet smile, "My inherent prolixity, no doubt." She says absently to the wrist-watch, "No doubt!" and then, looking up at the speaker, illogically asks, "What was the rest of the story? Go on."

Her brother protests: "Come, Judith, be reasonable! You're just like the people that author-chap has been telling us about downstairs . . . people who complain that his books are too long, and then ask for more. He says he's badgered for sequels, and untold gold wouldn't induce him to bring an old character into a new book."

"He's perfectly right. Anyhow, I am sure he always finishes a story when he begins it. I want the rest of what happened. Only I want this one cut short—not too prosy, please! Did you give that little boy the farthing cake?"

"I gave him a halfpenny. He ignored my application for change, and walked away hand-in-hand with his friend towards a shop. I accompanied the cab on foot to the end of Tallack Street, where we found the blooming board, and decided on its illegible character. But there was no doubt the piece of land was the one Illingworth had shown us on the map. The fictitious motor-garage was a place that could only have been a source of danger to rash intruders. We exclaimed together that there *were* no prem-

ises, and the cabman endorsed our opinion. At this juncture an exacerbated female rushed from a doorway to intercept and chastise, if possible, a little girl about ten years old, who had been peering at her through a window on the ground-floor. This little girl slipped through an impassable orifice and got away, shouting derision, but pursued by the woman. . . ."

"Who was more than half afraid of her." Thus Mr. Arkroyd parenthetically.

"I agree with you. However, she left her door open, and the little girl, whom I think we may consider to be identified as Eliza Ann Coupland, came out timidly, and sucked a corner of her neck-handkerchief in our immediate neighbourhood. She seemed to regard the clash between the other little girl and her mother as normal, and appeared to court conversation with us. . . ."

"It's not her mother. It's her aunt. *I* know the people." The interruption is Judith's. "But go on."

"Her aunt. Our conversation with her was handicapped by her shyness; also by her objection to removing the handkerchief from her mouth. But she appeared to be attracted to us by a kind of fascination, showing itself in a fixed gaze in a direction contrary to the pull of the handkerchief. Her aunt's injunction to her to put it out of her mouth and answer the gentleman led the gentleman to prevail on the aunt to withdraw. We then understood her to refer us to a friend, Bridget Hicks, for local information. . . ."

"Exactly. And Bridget Hicks called you a Cure."

"That is so. With what justice I am not in a position to say, without a more exact acquaintance with the meaning of the term. Bridget Hicks was the little girl who had fled before the wrath of the aunt. She joined her friend on witnessing the discomfiture of that lady by the tactics of your accomplished brother, who, I think, impressed her as Royalty."

"Very well, then!—it comes to this." It is Judith who is reporting progress. "The last time you spoke in the train was about a blind beggar whose little girl walks him about, and lives in that abominable slum papa has allowed to be built on the Cazenove estate, where I sent you because there was a board with something about vacant premises suitable for a factory on it. Why couldn't you say so at once?"

"May I be pardoned for suggesting," Scipio replies with a reinforcement of his sententious manner, which had lapsed slightly, "that, had I done so, a lengthy cross-examination would have been necessary to put my hearers in possession of details I have been able to supply."

His friend seems to think there is something in this. "Just consider, Judith," he says. "If Scip had cut himself down, as you suggest, you would have known nothing about Eliza Ann's neck-handkerchief. I consider that it speaks volumes."

"Scip, as you call him, could have thrown it in."

And Miss Arkroyd, who is more tall, impressive, and handsome than her mother, collects herself, which spreads over a great deal of fauteuil, to join the party in the other room. Her brother and his friend follow her.

The house-party in the room adjoining—that is, the large drawing-room with the Tintoret; perhaps you have been at Royd, and know it?—had been making a good deal of noise, considering the connection. One mustn't laugh too loud, if it's to be high-tension sweetness and light. This thought passed through the mind of Mr. Alfred Challis, better known to the world as "Titus Scroop," the great Author, who was one of the party; it was to him we referred as the perceptive guest. But he could not blame himself for causing any of the too-loud laughs; because, whenever he thought of a good thing, instead of speaking it out as he used to do when he was an Accountant, he kept it to himself and made a mental note of it for copy. But when he was clear in his mind, that a thing was not good enough for copy, he revealed it; and then the company laughed gently and obligingly, because he was a great Author. He felt sorry usually.

Mrs. Challis wasn't there. Mr. Challis used to visit at distinguished houses alone. But there was nothing against her. Discussion of whether she couldn't be asked this time always admitted that. But it invariably ended in a decision that Mrs. Challis was an Impossible Person—although Mrs. Candour had made every inquiry, and there was nothing whatever against her. "Still," said Lady Arkroyd to the Duchess of Rankshire, "even if there had been! . . ." And her Grace, predisposed to forgiveness of antecedents by native good-nature and a flawless record, saw regretfully that even then the lady would have been welcome, if only she had been Possible. Not being so, and being also, report said, huffy, she had never come to pass in polite society. Her husband believed he believed she was just as happy at home because a working hypothesis of life was *de rigueur*. She had certainly been almost rude to Lady Arkroyd on the occasion of a conciliatory visit; misunderstanding may have helped, but one thing is certain—she either was not asked to Royd this time or refused the invitation.

As to other folks, there were several. Only it was not easy to say which was which; it often isn't when there are several. They

have to be left alone to assume identities, and a certain percentage succeeds. The balance dies away. And then one of them afterwards writes a daring story, or ventilates a startling theory, or commits an interesting murder. And there he was, all that time, at the Simpkins's garden-party and you never knew! Were *you* also—you yourself—a nonentity some of the others were thinking of as a Person-at-a-Party, *et præterea nihil?* And is one of them now thinking to *him*self—dear him!—was that little, snuffy, unobtrusive chap really the author of this remarkable work, which appeals to the better side of my nature, and has scarcely a dull passage from beginning to end? Meaning, of course—*you!* And just to think!—he lost his chance, and may never get another. How sorry you feel for him!

These reflections are really in the story, because they were passing through the mind of Mr. Challis while a lady who had been asked to sing Carpathian Ballads was making up her mind which she would sing. In these philosophizings of his—especially the last one—may be detected the disagreeable sneering tone you never would have suspected him of. You would have thought him an easy-going chap—no more. It was there, though, and it affected his mind more or less all through the Carpathian Ballads. Whenever he was thrown on his own resources for a few minutes, the disagreeable sneering tone was apt to be audible to himself in his communings with his innermost soul. On this occasion, his innermost soul, being left alone with him for a short time, took occasion to decide that his host was a pompous old Ass. All these heavy landed proprietors were pompous Asses, more or less. The Woman—thus it referred to the lady of the house—was more interesting, of course. Women were. But she was a worldling, and a Philistine at heart, for all this pretence of worshipping Art and Letters and Song. As for the son, he gave himself airs; but it, the soul, wouldn't say anything against him because his cigars were undeniable. And the soul shared its owner's—if, indeed, he could call his soul his own!—appreciation of good 'baccy. The young Lord, it decided, was not a bad sample of his depraved class—would find his level in Parliament and be Under-Secretary of something, sometime. But he would have to learn to shout louder and speak faster. As for the two young women, the soul's owner had really only just distinguished one from the other. As for the music, the singer couldn't sing ballads, whatever else she could sing. *She* was nothing much to look at; but the eldest daughter had a fine throat and shoulders. Only nowadays you never could tell how much was real. As for the others, he hadn't made them

out yet. Lady Arkroyd had been civil to him at dinner, certainly. But then she had invited him. He had a vague sense that he was regarded as her property, and that the others all shirked responsibility on his account, and that he was, in fact, to them an outsider. Anyway, it was bad form of the son and his friend and the pair of shoulders, to go away and talk in the back room, and take no notice of—well!—of himself, for instance. At which point his innermost soul turned traitor—rounded on him, and accused him of allowing his disagreeable sneering tone to get the better of him—of giving way to ill-temper, in fact.

Perhaps these presents will be read by someone who has had a similar experience as a newcomer in a great house. He or she may also have found out that there is honey as well as wormwood, frankincense as well as assafœtida, to be met with in such a position, even as did Mr. Alfred Challis, the eminent novelist.

For, the Carpathian ballads coming to an end, that gentleman found himself suddenly being apprized, by the owner of the shoulders, that she had been longing for a word—with so eminent a writer—all the evening. And there was a question she was dying to ask him. Only they would have plenty of time to talk about that to-morrow. When was his next book coming out? . . . not till the spring? . . . oh dear! And what was the title? . . . "Titus Scroop" always had such interesting titles. . . . What? Not decided on? The fine eyes that went with the shoulders seemed surprised at this. "No doubt," said the Author, "the novel is as anxious as anyone to know what its title is going to be." This wasn't worth keeping for copy. The lady laughed the laugh that concedes that a joke has been made or meant, not the laugh of irresistible appreciation. What did that matter? Mr. Challis's ill-humour was being charmed away. Probably some student of human nature has noticed that it is not very material that the flattery of a good-looking woman should be sincere, provided mankind gets enough of it. Mr. Challis suspected that he was being soothed, and "Titus Scroop" spoken of in inverted commas, as compensation for having been left to choose between the company of other males and no company at all. But still, he *was* being soothed. No more words about it! Mr. Challis acquitted the shoulders, and even the mass of rich black hair, of any assistance from Art; and when the party broke up for the night, went to his couch contented.

Having, as it were, obsessed this gentleman, in order to get a clear view of this autumn's house-party at Royd, we may as well make further use of him and peep over his shoulder as he writes

his first letter to his impossible wife in the cretonne bedroom at the end of the passage where the German Baroness saw the ghost—you know that story, of course? Oh dear, what a lot of candles one does light to write letters by in other people's houses when one hasn't got to pay for them!

This is what Mr. Challis is writing now: ". . . I like the talky chap better than the son and heir. He's a lord. They neither of them take to me because I'm not 'Varsity. I came down in the train with them, only not the same carriage. I rode third, of course; there were no seconds." The writer felt that it was very clever of the thirds to be thirds at all when there were no seconds, but decided not to write it—as too subtle for the intellect of his impossible she—and wrote on: "I saw them playing cards in a smoking-carriage, and recognized the son and heir by his portrait. It isn't a bit like him. There's a fat pink politician here, with little eyes, who talks thirty-two to the dozen. His name is Ramsey Tomes. He pinned my host as he was coming from the dinner-table, and detained him ever so long. We heard the rumble of his rounded periods afar"—will she understand that? thought the writer—"long after everyone else had followed the womankind to the drawing-room. However, they came up in time for the music, and I heard Mr. Tomes assuring Sir Murgatroyd that his respect for that Bart was so intense that he would reconsider the whole of his political opinions forthwith, but without the slightest expectation of changing one jot or one tittle of them." Here the writer abstained, considerately, with his pen delayed over the inkstand, from inditing that he had never met with a "tittle" out of the company of its invariable jot. That would be too deep for this wife of his. He brought the pen slowly into the arena again. "Sir Murgatroyd repeated the same sentiment in several different words. As for all the other people, I must tell about them gradually, or leave them till I come home. The younger daughter, Sibyl—that's how to spell her name—not Sybil, remember—strikes me as a little waspish. Judith, the other, is a tall, handsome woman, with a figure expensive to dress but a little *prepotente*." He let this word stand, having written it, though he felt sure that the impossible one's Italian would not cover it. He did not mind leaving her to choose a meaning for it; it franked him of any responsibility. Then he thought he had written enough, and ended up: "You need not be uneasy about my neuralgia. I feel better already and shall have a hot bath first thing in the morning.—Your loving mate, A. C." But he added an amends for an omission—"Kiss the kids from me."

Then he betrayed further uneasiness of conscience by saying to himself: "After all, she's much better at home with the babies. She would never get on among these people." Whether it occurred to the good gentleman that he had it in his power to alter the position of the pieces on the board we do not know. If it did, the idea soon vanished behind a speculation whether the next guest after him would have a new acreage of clean sheet and pillow all to himself; and if not, what a lot of washing went for nothing! He almost wished he was a chimney-sweep, to make it valid.

CHAPTER IV

OF MISS ARKROYD AND HER AVIARY. HOW MR. CHALLIS WALKED IN THE GARDEN WITH HER. OF MR. TRIPTOLEMUS WRAXALL. AND OF HOW MR. CHALLIS WROTE TO HIS WIFE

It is bewildering to reflect on the number of avenues open to Society by which to approach its own final perfection. And disappointing, too, when a start has been made along some promising one, to come so soon to a parting of the ways, with never a signpost—not so much as a stray uncrucified Messiah for a guide—as the night falls over the land. For even so, each last new Theory of Perfectibility, each panacea for the endemics that afflict us, seems to pass from the glory of its dawn to the chill hours of its doubt; and its Apostles fall away and change their minds, and its subscribers discontinue their subscriptions, and it becomes out of date. And those who have not lain low, like Br'er Fox, but have committed themselves past all recall to its infallibility, are sorry because they cannot remind us that they said so all along, only they were never paid the slightest attention to.

It is possible that some such perceptions passed through Mr. Challis's reflective mind in the course of next day at Royd. He began to find out that he was in a sort of hornet's nest of Reformers, every one of them anxious to point out avenues of salvation for Society. For Sir Murgatroyd, who was the soul of liberality towards every doctrine, political, religious, or social, that he had no prejudice against, liked nothing better than to crowd his house full of reforming theorists. Was he not himself one, and the author of a pamphlet called "The Higher Socialism: An Essay towards a Better Understanding of the Feudal System"? He therefore welcomed with splendid hospitality every advocate of every doctrine that was undoubtedly new, only two conditions being complied with. One was that if it was a New Morality it should be possible to enter into its details without shocking—suppose we say—a hardened reader of Laurence Sterne; and the other that it should not countenance, palliate, advocate, encourage, support, or lend adhesion to his especial *bête noire,* the Americaniza-

tion of our Institutions. On this particular occasion a fine bag of neo-archs—how apologize for such a word?—had been secured by him during his summer holiday; and when Mr. Challis made his appearance at the breakfast-table next morning, he was buttonholed away from its beautiful clean damask by a brace of Thinkers, each anxious to communicate his Thoughts, and, if possible, entangle the sympathies of a powerful pen "Titus Scroop" was known to possess.

It *is* annoying to be interrupted when you are making up your mind what you'll have; and then you take poached eggs when you want filleted plaice, or *vice-versa*. Mr. Challis showed intrepidity, saying to a disciple of the learned German reformer Graubosch: "I make a point of never listening to anything worth hearing at breakfast." It was a clever repulse; but committed him to capitulation to Graubosch later. He succeeded, but with a like reservation, in escaping from an advocate of a really formidable system of Assurance which would have widespread effects on Society, by saying—as though the first few words of its exponent had gone home to him—"You and I must talk that out over a game of billiards." The fact is this gentleman had not been sufficiently congratulated about his last book, so far, by the ladies of the family; and he felt a strong bias towards being flattered by Miss Arkroyd particularly, although in his letter to his wife he had spoken with coldness—ostentatious, and he knew it—of this young lady's fascinations. So he was already scheming in his heart to get her in a corner by herself, where she would be able to express her wonder at his insight into things no one else—except she and he, presumably—knew anything about. He was perceptibly conscious that the short interview between himself and this very good-looking young lady, the evening before, had lacked reference to his insight, and that recognition in that quarter would be pleasant.

It is a little difficult to saunter away from Thinkers who are convinced that you will be interested in their Thoughts, especially if you have given any of them the right to begin, "Referring to what we were saying yesterday, etc."; or, "I have been thinking over that apparent contradiction, etc." But it can be done, with tact. Mr. Challis had not a perfectly clear record of avoidance of Philosophy: his buttonholers of the morning could have pleaded justifications. So he felt diplomatic as he got into another coat because the sun was quite hot in the garden, and then came down the other stairs, where he was sure to meet nobody, and so through the kitchen-gardens to the Inigo Jones orangery that was now an aviary. That was where Miss Arkroyd had said she was going—

not to him, but to someone else in his hearing. So clearly so that it was almost as good as if he hadn't heard, but had approached her by accident, when he came upon her out of a side-avenue of clipped hedges. By that time he was sauntering quite naturally, with a cigar in his mouth, just begun. This was as it should be.

"Have you seen my green parroquets?" said the lady.

"I haven't noticed any. Are they loose in the garden?" As though they would have been! But Mr. Challis wasn't in earnest.

"Not that I know of! Did you see any?" She had taken him quite seriously, and he had to explain.

"It was my ill-judged facetiousness," said he. "I meant I had been nowhere except in the garden."

"Oh, I see! You quite frightened me. They are such nice little people. Come in and look at them." But Mr. Challis felt that he would have to practise a certain discretion in his accustomed modes of speech, one of which was a perverse gravity over an obvious absurdity. But he had long given up expecting insight into this from Marianne, the impossible wife. Why should he, then, from this young woman, to whom he and his ways were quite a novelty? Besides, we had to consider the individualities of that strange creature, the human Toff. Mr. Challis reflected that absurd tropes and inversions, without a smile, are the breath of life to cab and bus men. Perhaps William the Norman never put his royal tongue in his cheek: it may have been contrary to the Feudal System.

The little parroquets didn't wait for their proprietor and this new gentleman to come into their palace. The moment they heard them they came with a wild rush into an outside cage. But, being out, they took no notice of their disturbers—none whatever! They conversed about them, clewed side by side on a long perch, with a stunning and unhesitating volubility that made the brain reel, a shrill, intolerable prestissimo of demisemiquavers on one note that pierced the drum of the ear like a rain of small steel shot. They had come to so exactly the same conclusion, so it seemed, as they all repeated it at once, first to right, then to left—had so precisely the same opinion about their visitors, that it was hardly necessary to dwell upon it so long, Mr. Challis thought.

"Are they sweet, or are they not?" was what his companion said. Challis admitted the sweetness—or possible sweetness—of their dispositions. But he took exception to their voices. He would have preferred these to be more like Cordelia's. The nice little people kept up such a fire of comment, although Miss Arkroyd was now supplying them with cherries, that Challis could hardly hear

what she was saying. But he gathered that it was eulogy of the way in which he had referred to the voice of Cordelia and King Lear's description of it, in one of his novels. Only it seemed to him that she was putting the saddle on the wrong horse—ascribing the passage to the wrong book, for she mentioned the "Spendthrift's Legacy," the first work that introduced him to his public. As is frequently the case, this book continued to be the one he was most connected with by non-readers of his works, for all that many more recent ones had had a much larger circulation.

"Are you sure it isn't in 'The Epidermis'?" he asked.

"What isn't?"

"'Gentle and low, an excellent thing in women'—or parrots—what you referred to just now. . . ."

"What's 'The Epidermis'? Who's it by? I mean—I've seen it. But I didn't know it was yours." Whereat Mr. Challis felt crushed. Fancy anybody not knowing whom "The Epidermis" was by! If it had only been not having read it yet, *that* could have been softened by confession of intense yearning to do so, unfairly frustrated by anæmic Circulating Libraries. But not to know whom it was by!

"Name of my last book. Fidgetts and Thrills. Six Shillings net." Mr. Challis affected a light joking tone. But he was mortified. However, Miss Arkroyd was under obligation to invent something of a palliative nature, and in the effort Cordelia's voice lapsed.

"Oh yes-s-s-s!" said she, dwelling on the "s" to express a mind momentarily bewildered, but awaiting a light that was sure to come, if she made the hiss long enough, and then cutting sharply in with an interruption to it. "I was thinking of another book. *Quite* another!" And then closed the subject for good, but as one that might have been pursued had she been thinking of a book that was rather another, but not quite.

You see, the fact was that this young woman had read *none* of this author's works, though it seemed she yearned to do so. She had had no time for reading, and the book had always got sent back to Mudie's before she had read it, and so on. Well!—we can all sympathize, can't we? But, then, she shouldn't have pretended she had, because that was fibs. At most she had read a quotation from one of his stories—she couldn't say which—in a review.

Mr. Challis suspected all this, and was too much a man of the world to commit the blunder of proving that a lady had told fibs, however insignificant. He was rather glad the little green birds kept in such good voice, for though they usually dropped their

cherries and wanted another, they never dropped their subject. They helped the position, and Challis felt he ought to help, too. His vanity was a little wounded; but, then, how jolly comfortable that bed was, and what a lovely cold douche that was after a real hot bath and what a choice cigar this was, just recently supplied by this lady's brother! No!—he would be generous, and help.

"How charmingly your sister draws! I was looking at her landscapes last night."

"She's Prong's favourite pupil."

"She's very clever?"

"Oh yes!—she can do anything she turns her hands to. We differ on many points. But it's impossible to deny her cleverness. Poor Sibyl!—I suppose she can't help it."

"Can't help what?"

"Well!—rubbing me up the wrong way. But we all do that." Challis began to feel that he was in the bosom of the Family. He might ask questions freely, and did so as soon as the quiet of a retired walk in the garden allowed freedom of speech. The parroquets dropped the subject abruptly as soon as they found themselves alone.

"What's the Great Idea? I heard Lady Arkroyd talking of it to Lord Felixthorpe. It was her idea, wasn't it?"

"Do you mean Mamma's?" Judith asked. Mr. Challis had not, and hesitated a moment. Should he say, "Miss Sibyl's"? Surely no! Sunday citizens would say that. Very well, then! Should it be "Sibyl's" or "Your sister's"? He almost wished the young females of this landed family were *ladyships;* it comes so much handier for outsiders. He risked the point, and said, "Sibyl's," but softened the offence by adding, "Your sister's, I mean." If the fine eyelids were offended, they concealed it remarkably well. So much so that Mr. Challis said to himself that no doubt the Normans Christian-named more than the Saxons. Or, were those eyelids lenient towards his personal self? He was a married man, certainly; only, then!—a married man may feel flattered, look you! But this is not our affair at present. How about the Great Idea?

"Sibyl's idea, of course." The speaker accepted the Christian name; she could have said "My sister's" stiffly. "It's a perfectly mad one. A sort of new Factory, or perhaps I ought to say Institution. Everything is to be made there, only nobody is to be allowed to work there who is qualified to do anything else."

"Anything else than what?"

"Why—don't you understand? Arts and crafts. Enamels and

lace and tapestry and hammered brass and copper. Not manufactures—mediæval things. . . ."

"Oh, ah!—I know."

"All that sort of thing. Well!—the Great Idea is to take either some premises of the proper sort, or a piece of land and build a Factory, with studios for herself and Lady Betty Inglis; she must be in it to make Sir Spender Inglis, who's enormously rich, find half the capital. I've done *my* best . . . to prevent it. But it's no use my saying anything. Will keeps her up to it."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. You see, he's been looking into the question of building, and is certain he could build at half the usual cost. So he wants to try his hand on the Factory."

"Poor Sir Spender!"

"That's what I say. And poor Papa! However, that's not Will's only reason. He wants to build some workshops for himself to carry out experiments in wireless high-tension currents and aerostation. *I* don't understand these things."

"Your brother seems a universal genius, too?"

"Yes. But then, he took a very high degree at Cambridge. He always has that excuse. Sibyl has no degree, and ought to know better."

"What exactly is going to be done at the Factory? And are all the hands to be ladies? Or how?"

"Very much 'how?' I should say. The idea is, to employ no one who can do anything else anywhere else. People with one hand or one eye. Colour-blind guards who can't get places on railways. Deaf and dumb people that can read the Scriptures aloud automatically and never be any the wiser, don't you know?"

"Was that what your brother was talking about to your sister"—in this exact context "Sibyl" would hardly have worked in—"last night? About a blind chap he told her of. She thought he might be taught to model."

"Did they talk about him? I didn't hear them. A blind beggar-man in a street where I slum—sells matches, or pretends to. They won't get *him* to work for ten shillings a week."

"Why not?"

"Because he's earning ten shillings a day, probably, and putting by money. They do. Isn't that somebody calling me? . . . Yes. . . . I'm coming."

And then the young lady, with a parting benediction to her hearer for the amusing talk they had had, vanished in response to some summons which she had distinguished as intended for herself.

He for his part thought it necessary to propose to himself, and to carry unanimously, a vote of confidence in the great advantage to the brain it was to get away from one's surroundings now and again, and get a complete change. He had the hypocrisy to add that the said surroundings stood to derive benefit also, in ways not precisely specified. He felt stimulated and braced, confirmed in the image he treasured of his own identity. His interview with Miss Arkroyd had been like having the hair of his soul brushed by machinery, and called for classification. It was necessary to protest against a remark something somewhere had made, that his own home need not suffer by contrast. He indignantly repudiated the necessity for discussing the matter, as he threw away a cigar he had taken some time to smoke.

Still, he did not feel so sure on the point as not to be glad to be finally pinioned by a gentleman with a theory, whom he had provisionally escaped from at breakfast, an hour before. This was Mr. Triptolemus Wraxall, the Apostle of Universal Security, whose belief that policies and premiums were remedies for all this world's evils had taken possession of him while discharging the duties of visiting inspector to a Fire Insurance Office. In the intervals of his inspections, the object of which was to detect risks of fire in order that no policies should be issued where any such risks existed, he had evolved from his inner consciousness a number of systems, all practicable in the highest degree—almost self-acting, in fact. At least, they were none of them foolish, like the Rejected Proposal Insurance (Matrimony), which we believe fell through in consequence of the dishonest connivance of the parties, renewed proposals being frequently accepted within twenty-four hours of the payment of the sum assured. It was even reported that young ladies had advanced the first year's premium in some cases, in return for a commission of seventy-five per cent. at settlement; and that the Office was dissuaded with difficulty by its solicitors from commencing proceedings for conspiracy. An absurd scheme!

The scheme Mr. Wraxall was anxious to lay before Mr. Challis was at least (said its inventor) worthy of serious consideration. It was a simple System of Assurance in which unborn legitimate male children would, by payment of a premium, secure to themselves the full advantages of a University education. Of course, he did not rely on their personal application—that was to be done on their behalf by their proposed parents—but it was not only ladies and gentlemen who had substantial guarantees for the appearance of these undergraduates, but *any lady and gentleman whatever* were to be at liberty to take out Policies of Assurance, the premiums

getting less and less in proportion as the improbability of the couple ever having lawful issue became greater and greater. The modest sum of fifty pounds was to cover a claim for the possible son of an engaged couple (as bashfully alluded to in marriage settlements); while a full hundred was required for an infant of unknown sex awaiting advertisement in the birth column of the *Times*. On the other hand, where there was very little chance of the courtship having a successful issue (as in the case of extreme youth of the parties) the premium went down contemptuously to a sovereign. Children in arms betrothed by their parents were to enjoy all the advantages of the institution for two shillings and sixpence. But the lowest figure on the list, nine decimal point ought-six pence, was the sum for which any married gentleman could secure its benefits for the not necessarily impossible son, born in lawful wedlock of himself and *any* lady, also married elsewhere, provided that the couple were of different nationalities and each resident at home. It was thought necessary, said Mr. Wraxall, to bar cases of murder by the policy-holder, of whichever sex.

"I can't see the necessity," said Challis. "The Office could not refuse to carry out the bargain because of suspicion of murder; and in case of conviction the chance of a family goes down to almost *nil*, because of the hanging. See?"

"Quite so, as a rule. But cases might occur of conviction and hanging deferred for months, even years. It might even happen that an insured son had become a *bénéficiare* to the extent of a complete University education before either of his parents was arrested for murder. Such an event would have to be provided against, or due allowance made in fixing the amount of the premium. But without going so far as that, we should meet with instances of murderers under this arrangement getting married while out on bail. A posthumous son could not be fairly branded as illegitimate because his father was hanged and his mother sentenced to penal servitude before his birth. Holy Matrimony is all that legitimacy demands."

"Couldn't you raise the premium, so as to cover all possible cases? Distaste for murder, on its merits, would tend to keep the number low. Make it eighteenpence."

"Pardon me, Mr. Challis, you do not understand Human Nature. The passing from pence to shillings marks a crucial point of its susceptibilities. For one man who will go over a shilling to provide against a defined contingency you will meet with a million who will invest pence on some chance they almost deny the existence of, simply because, if it *did* come to pass, the benefit

would be so out of all proportion to the sum risked to obtain it. If an investment of one halfpenny could be shown to connect itself with a possible gain of ten million pounds, the whole population of the world would plunge to that extent. There can be no reasonable doubt that, however improbable it may seem to any married man that he should marry the widow of a particular foreigner, quite unknown, still, the advantage of having their son's education provided at a cost of nine point-ought-six pence would be an irresistible argument in favour of its outlay. Nothing short of mathematical certainty that no such son was possible would . . ."

"I understand perfectly. That is my own view. *I* draw the line at a shilling. To go beyond it opens up a world of immoral extravagance. . . ." The speaker felt in danger of yawning, and, to avoid it and break loose from his persecutor, had to fall back on the time-honoured expedient of inventing a neglected duty elsewhere. He drew his watch suddenly from its pocket with the *verve* of an angler landing a fish, and exclaimed with sudden deep conviction: "I really must run!"

And Mr. Alfred Challis ran, and found that letters for the Post had to be ready at eleven forty-five. He had come away from home with the best intentions of writing a line every day to his wife, and, indeed, had meant to write long humorous letters with satirical descriptions of the British Toff at Home, all the points of which would make good copy after, as it was only Marianne. It wasn't like repeating a published article. But this time it would have to be a line, or at most a sheet of note-paper; and it was accordingly.

When one has arrived at the time of life when one weighs beforehand each sentence one writes, even to an intimate friend—instead of dashing recklessly on, as in one's glorious youth—how glad one sometimes is to be put under compulsion about the contents of a letter! Challis wouldn't acknowledge his obligation to the coercion of the Postal limit—not he! But he felt it all the same. For he couldn't have filled out his letter with Universal Security. Marianne wouldn't have understood a word of it. It wasn't her line. And as for his long talk with Judith Arkroyd . . . well, now!—why on earth couldn't he just write that he had had one, and that she had told him a lot about the family, and he would write a long letter about it next time, but really this was only a line to catch the Post. Why not, indeed? Yes, of course, that was the proper thing to write. He wrote it, and denied the pause, to his own satisfaction. But he was grateful to the Post for being so coercive and superseding and cancelling all considerations of—of what? He denied that there was anything to cancel, and directed the letter.

CHAPTER V

OF A RAINY DAY AT ROYD. HOW A MOTOR-CAR CAME TO GRIEF. HOW MISS ARKROYD'S MOTHER WENT TO THANES CASTLE AND SHE HERSELF DIDN'T

A LITTLE bit of duty done always seems at its best when it has taken the form of a written letter. Because when the time comes for posting, whatever the letter may contain—whether it be a lame apology for breaking an engagement, or a promise to send a cheque without fail next week—the penny stamp and the direction are just the same as if it had been to reproach Angela for not appearing yesterday at church-parade in Hyde Park, or had enclosed a final discharge of your tailor's account. So Mr. Challis's rather perfunctory line to catch the Post, boldly stamped and directed, quite set his mind at ease about his home obligations as soon as ever it was licked and stuck to, past recall.

In fact, so relieved was his conscience, after he had handed this letter to Elphinstone the butler to see that it went to the Post for him, that he felt quite at liberty to enjoy some more soul-brush the next time the chance came. All the more from a conviction of the importance of its contents conveyed by the professional manner of Mr. Elphinstone's reception of it—a manner that said, "*This* really important letter *shall* go, whatever other don't!" If this enjoyment of the soul-brush became too oppressive to his conscience, he could square accounts by an extra sheet or so of letter-paper.

Anyhow, he could now live for the present. He was rather disgusted to find that, whatever he decided on to enjoy next, it would have to be in the house, unless he was prepared to get wet out of doors. For, taking a mean advantage of him while he was writing his short letter, it had come on to rain.

In a country-house, when it comes on to rain after a fine early morning, despair settles on the household, which wanders about moaning, and looking for someone to come and have a game at billiards; or lamenting the cruel fate which has beguiled it into putting its things on, and now it supposes that it had better go and

take them off again and settle down to something, because it's going to pour; or asking what was the name of that capital game we played every day at Fen Grange, for instance, when it rained for three weeks on end, and nobody was the least bored. It is in sad hours such as this that you seek for a chess-opponent and find none, except a class of player that knows the moves, whom you fly from candidly; and then, if fortunate, you may meet with one of another class, who has forgotten the openings. Secure him, but don't let him set you an interesting problem and run away.

"I've never played, but I should like to learn. Only I really don't know where the men are. Nobody plays here, you see, and they get lost or hidden in cupboards." Thus Judith in the second hour of a steady downpour to Mr. Challis's inquiry, for he was always ready for a game at chess, without being keen about it.

"You are not getting on with your book, anyhow!" said he. "Can't I hunt about for the chessmen till I find them?" The book was one he had recommended at the first coming of the rain, and it was when it was closed in despair that Challis asked his question.

"I think we must ask Elphinstone. Would you ring?" Challis rang, and a sub. who appeared was instructed to consult Mr. Elphinstone. Judith continued: "No!—I hate sinners who are touched by the *Dies Iræ* in a cathedral and repent; especially when they've got too old to do any real mischief. I would sooner they went to the Devil honestly. . . ." And so the chat ran on, Challis cordially concurring, and not hinting at any joy whatever over the sinner that repenteth, until the young man Samuel came back with chessmen. There was another set, of ivory, it appeared, but Mr. Elphinstone had desired Samuel to say that a prawn was defective, and one of the bishops was out of his socket, and couldn't be got to screw in. Samuel had been put to it to charge his memory with this obscure message; he was confident about the prawn, but had misgiving about the bishop—feared it was disrespectful to the Church perhaps; but went away relieved when nothing explosive came of it. His situation was safe.

Many of us know that teaching chess is no sinecure. The *alumnus* who refuses to accept the rules as they stand; who wants to know why the pawns may not move backwards; why the pieces may not jump over, like in draughts; why the queen should have such absurd latitude; who thinks all the black pieces should remain on the black squares, and *per contra*—how well we know him! And the difficulty a peculiar class of intellect has in mastering the knight's move, condemning it on its merits, as too much like

squinting, or italics! And another yet, which, on being shown how to make a particular move, makes it, and says contentiously: "Well! —I don't see anything so very clever in that."

Miss Arkroyd did not quite do any of these things, but she was nearly as bad. She remembered the moves, in the abstract, but forgot which of the pieces made them; and this answered as well as forgetting the moves for all purposes of confusion. With so beautiful a hand it couldn't matter how much she fingered the pieces. And Mr. Challis seemed very contented. The instruction was a farce, but it served its turn, and a sort of appearance of a game developed while the rain outside came steadily down, and checkmated everyone in the house. Desultory chat, in which the question, "Whose move is it?" frequently occurred, helped Challis to a further insight into family conditions and local history. *En revanche* the young lady added to her impressions of Challis's own domestic circumstances and his literary career, and found that an image was forming in her mind of Mrs. Challis. It wasn't a beautiful image, but it was worthy. It was that of a good soul. But not a good sort of body—nothing so bad as that! She felt glad, for Challis's sake. A good soul and the best of wives; that kind of thing! You couldn't expect education of very finished achievement in those sort of people, in the class she came from. For Miss Arkroyd had got somehow a perfectly clear impression of a class undefinable, but homogeneous and recognizable by symptoms. A class that didn't dress for dinner, a class that liked potatoes in their skins as a palliative to cold moist roast mutton *d' obbligo;* and did not condemn, but merely looked coldly on, at *menu*'s and finger-glasses. A class whose males smoked pipes and whose females refused cigarettes; which, though its young learned French at school, condemned France as the most salient foreign incident on an incorrigibly foreign Continent, and a perfect moral plague-spot of unfaithful wives and husbands.

But however good a soul this man's wife was, Judith caught herself being sorry for him. Yesterday evening, when she went good-naturedly to him, as to her mother's latest discovery, just to say a few words and prevent his getting left out in the cold, he had seemed to her only moderately interesting, and far from handsome. Now she began with a discriminating eye to see that, though he was far from handsome, he was just as far from ugly. Still, she perceived that it did credit to her discriminating eye to find this out. She hadn't noticed it so much when he turned up unexpectedly in the garden in the morning—unexpectedly, because she was really unconscious of having said in his hearing that she

was going across the lawn to feed her birds. But now, in a lucky half-light in the red drawing-room, with his eyes dropped on the chess-board, his forehead and eye-framing had a look about them that was certainly interesting, if not a good substitute for beauty. Judith would have preferred the beauty, certainly; but she could look contentedly at the good soul's property, and go on wondering what *she* was like, while he considered knotty points connected with the game.

"You've put your king in check, Miss Arkroyd. You mustn't do that." He looked up suddenly and caught her eyes. Her *rapport* with the game saved him from his vanity by good luck. "I see you thought you had caught me," was his interpretation of her gaze. It was in token of a supposed triumph, so he thought. Whatever it was, it became disconcerted.

"Oh!—mustn't I do that? I think it oughtn't to count, when one does it oneself. Don't you?" Challis said to himself that this woman was rather a goose. Why he felt a little disappointed at her being rather a goose he could not have said off-hand. He apologized for the stupidity of the laws of games generally; said they were clearly wrong all round. But it would make such a lot of fuss to alter them now that he doubted if it was worth it.

"You're not in earnest, Mr. Challis?" So the lady spoke, and Challis said to himself that Marianne would never have found that out. "Sharp, by comparison!" was his comment to himself; and then aloud: "But I can't have you bored, Miss Arkroyd. You don't care about this." To which Judith replied: "It's not exciting, so far;" and both laughed. The discovery that each had been thinking the same thing was full of conductivities. It improved their footing.

"It can't be, you know, when you come to think of it," said he, pushing his chair expressively three inches back—an expression of renunciation—with a slight boredom-admitting stretch. "Chess requires apprenticeship before it can be enjoyed, like smoking."

"I see. And this game has made me sick, like a boy's first cigar. Why didn't you tell me?"

"One must begin some time. . . . Well! I don't know either. Must one? . . ."

"There was nothing else to do."

"We might have gone into the billiard-room and heard politics. I heard them going on through the door a little while ago. Mr. . . . what's his name?—the politician . . ."

"Mr. Ramsey Tomes?"

"Mr. Ramsey Tomes. I gathered that he was giving details of his great scheme of Reciprocal Interdependent Taxation of Imports—what he touched upon at dinner last night. . . ."

"Don't let me disturb the chess!" says a passer through the room. It is Lady Arkroyd with an armful of some form of embroidery which no one is on any account to assist her in carrying to the drawing-room beyond. But what she means is, "Don't arrest my progress. Mind your own business." Challis makes a convulsive suggestion of willingness to assist the Universe, but doesn't mean anything at all by it; and her ladyship floats away, leaving him normal. But his plunge, overdone from dramatic motives, has knocked the board over. The Fates seem to league together to throw cold water on this ill-starred game. Judith conveys the fact by a shrug, but adds a smile, that it may be understood there is no *amertume* in the situation. Further, she says she can hear Tea. A sense that Life's problem is solved for the moment mixes with a consciousness of hairbrush-time come again, and Mr. Challis disperses to reassemble presently and enjoy it.

How it is pouring, to be sure! And how grateful one feels to it —abstraction though it be—for doing it in earnest, and making an end of all doubts whether we may not get out for a turn later. Nobody is going to do that to-day.

Challis encounters young Lord Felixthorpe on the stairs, coming from the billiard-room. He is always amiable and well-mannered, this young nobleman, and manages to make everyone think he has their good opinion of him at heart. But he often seems to be seeking their sympathy with his derision of someone else. Or of himself, for that matter—so Challis goes on thinking, for all this is what passes in *his* mind; the story does not vouch for its truth. During their slow ascent of the great staircase together, he is more than half-convinced that the young toff really cares about his views on motoring.

"I am quite aware," says his lordship, pausing at a corner, as though one might go upstairs at any slowness, even with the young man Samuel and a colleague agglomerating gilded porcelain within hearing as tea-factors. "I am quite aware, my dear Mr. Challis, that the motor-car is at present an object of execration to the public. But I sympathize so keenly that I feel bound to spend as much time as possible in the only place in which I am not tempted to forget myself and use bad language against motorists. I refer to the motor-car itself. Believe me that the only thing that can reconcile a well-constituted mind to any practice essentially

damnable is the practice itself. I shall look forward to your accompanying me in my Panhard, after a profusion of curses perfectly reasonably directed against it—in which you will have my sincerest sympathy."

"When do you expect the detestable contrivance—I make no disguises, you see—to arrive? I shall be here for a week, if my hosts continue to tolerate me."

"It ought to be here now. From the fact that it is *not* here now, I am led to infer that something has happened. In this cautious expression you will kindly observe that it includes the possibility that my chauffeur, Louis Rossier, has got drunk on the road, and has stopped the night at an inn to become sober."

"Or he may have been poisoned by petroleum."

"Yes, or his head may have been cut off by a police-wire, stretched across the road in the dark. But in that case I fancy we should have heard."

When Challis descended the stairs, he paused to look out at the great window with the quarried grisaille and armorial bearings in each light, and saw through a quarry temporarily repaired with common window-glass a clear view of the approach to the house, dutifully draining off the deluge that continued to fall steadily—steadily—on the gravel road the great beech avenue took such care of, standing on each side of it all the way to just this side of the Lodge. How well he knew what that soaked gravel would have to say to the pedestrian who ventured out—what it *was* saying to that unhappy man in some sort of oilskin costume who was coming slowly, jadedly along, above his undersquelch and below an umbrella that can have done him very little good. Mr. Challis saw at a glance that he was not indigenous to the soil; a second glance determined that he was a Frenchman; a third that he was a chauffeur. Certainly Louis Rossier—who else? He smiled as a non-motorist smiles when a motor comes to grief. When he reached the drawing-room, Mr. Ramsey Tomes was already applying for a second cup. That gentleman was thirsty, no doubt. He had talked for two hours. Not that he meant to stop—far from it!

Challis had no one to talk to for the moment, so he listened to Mr. Tomes, who went on again as soon as he had made sure there were two lumps.

"I start from an aspect of the question that must compel the most incredulous to admit that at least the matrix is ripe for solution."

As the orator paused a moment, everyone felt bound to fructify

a little, and said, "I see, you propose to . . ." or, "I see your idea . . ." or merely got as far as "I see you . . ." and remained stranded. All except the disciple of Graubosch, who muttered knowingly, "The Brandenbierenschreiligrath System. Graubosch's Appendix B deals with it." He and Mr. Wraxall exchanged astute nods; the latter to oblige, because he really knew nothing about it. But Mr. Tomes wasn't going to leave anything vague. Not he!—a man with a fixed glare, and loaded to the muzzle with exhaustive elucidation!

Challis did not wait for the next instalment. He cast about for an anchorage, and had not found a satisfactory one when Lord Felixthorpe, who had not appeared at the beginning of Tea, came into the room with something to communicate written on his countenance.

"What's gone amiss, Scip?" said his friend, William Rufus.

"That idiot Rossier . . ."

"I told you he was a fool. What's he done now?"

"Left the machine in a ditch, and walked home through the mud. . . . Oh no, he hasn't hurt himself. I wish he had—in moderation." The public becomes interested, and explanation spreads over the room. A lady's voice says, afar, that its owner supposes now we shall lose our excursion, and that place will be gone, and it would have been the very thing. Challis doesn't understand this, and asks Judith the meaning. He is in her neighbourhood somehow—seems to have sacrificed hearing more about the accident. She supposes Sibyl meant the place for the Great Idea. But they couldn't have gone to-morrow unless the weather mended, anyhow.

People chatter so in a room full; you soon lose threads of conversation. Challis knew little more about either the accident or the Great Idea when he went away to dress for dinner an hour later. He was only aware that Mr. Tomes was still at work on the Reciprocal Interdependent Taxation of Imports, and that Miss Arkroyd was going to play Halma with him if he came up soon enough after dinner.

In his letter to Marianne, written after he went up to his room rather early—people are very apt to think it's getting on for bedtime after rain-beleaguered days in country-houses—Mr. Challis merely mentioned two games at Halma, and adduced the exciting character of that game as a reason why very little was said. His letter implied that he was being bored, which was untrue. However, the words "in the house all day" would do that without an

antidote. And we couldn't expect him to mention the soul-brush, especially as he disallowed its existence. He said a good deal of what he did know of the motor-car mishap, which was natural, for —so he said—he had inferred, from the excitement on the subject, that this car, when it appeared, would be the first ever seen by most of the inhabitants of the district.

This machine was the latest extravagance of young Lord Felixthorpe, who had spent a thousand pounds upon it; and its arrival from the agent at Grime, who was to welcome it—or rather its components—to England, and to qualify it for the enjoyment of its riders, and the execrations of its victims, was looked forward to with feverish anxiety by both. But he could not give such details as were supplied next day, after a fuller sifting of Louis Rossier's report, which was not very intelligible at first. These had to wait for a postscript, which told how the chauffeur, who did not understand three words of English, had proved as sensitive to misdirection as the compass is to the magnetic current. He went the wrong way instinctively several times, and was headed back, or fingerpointed back, just as often. In the end he made an unfortunate choice between two roads, although warned by a long shouted instruction from a turnipfield—which ignored his nationality robustly—that the cross-over bridge, when he come to Sto'an's mill, nigh the running wa'ater, wasn't to be troosted to carry lo'ads; and the shouter would be rather shoy of it, in yower place. But you might take e'er a one of they two ways, at your liking. Being none the wiser, Louis Rossier chose the more tempting one; and when he came to the cross-over bridge, which spanned a ditch, could not, of course, tell the meaning of the Local Authority's posted caution to the effect that nothing over two tons was to use it; with the result that it gave way in the middle. It was too small a bridge to let any vehicle larger than a goat-chaise through and almost too small a ditch to accommodate one, but the motor was trapped and detained in its sunk centre.

"You'll have to get to t' Hall on Sha'anks's mear, yoong ma-an," said a native, who was not really taking pains to hide his joy at the mishap. Louis got to the Hall, but didn't know he had ridden Shanks's mare.

However, for a first accident with a new Panhard, it wasn't so bad! Only one tyre ruined; its comrade was mendable. In the end the gorgeous scarlet vehicle was got to the house by horses, and was recovering its spirits and snorting, with the new spare tyre on, by the time the company at the Hall had eaten too much lunch, and were arranging how they would spend their afternoon. Chal-

lis had despatched his letter of the previous night, and was enjoying himself. A gloriously fine day, following an isolated local depression of the barometer, had removed the local depressions the latter had occasioned to everyone else, and Miss Arkroyd had ended a second interview over the parroquets by promising to take him to see the Roman and British camps on the other side of the village.

The first really professional excursion of the new motor was to be dedicated to the Great Idea. For the Great Idea, however vaguely it was formulated, was clear about one thing. Premises would be *de rigueur*. It was therefore incumbent on its promoters to inspect premises, both in town and country. At present the latter was the more popular, because the weather was superb, and the notion of incorporating with the Factory a Village Community, and perhaps a Garden City, both in the evening with a flawless Autumn sky, was too tempting to be neglected. So, this afternoon, William Rufus and Sibyl and Lord Felixthorpe—in spite of an impression he gave that he was treating the Great Idea with derision—were to run over to Whealhope Paulswell, about thirty miles off, in the motor, to give that treasure a baptismal run and inspect an extinct factory, which had been empty a quarter of a century. They would be back by dinner-time.

Sir Murgatroyd, of whom we have seen nothing, as he has been continually talking about the ruin of English Trade with Mr. Ramsey Tomes, was going to take that gentleman to see some manure. People can look at some manure, and talk about nefarious Germany, both at once. There is reason to suppose that these two gentlemen talked of very little but the ruin of English Trade during the whole of this visit to Royd. And wherever any member of the household was employed—we are recording the impressions of Mr. Alfred Challis—he or she could always hear, in the remote distance, what was only too clearly Mr. Tomes taking this opportunity to state, once for all; or Sir Murgatroyd feeling bound, alike as a Statesman and an Englishman, to protest against. A steady, continuous rumble, on these lines, accompanied the not particularly busy hum of men, women, and chits, that made up the round of life at Royd. The chits, by-the-by, of which there were two or three, naturally involved a corresponding number of young men, each to each; or each in the pocket of each, as you choose. None of them seemed the least ashamed of never having a word to throw at anyone outside the pocket, except its owner, and the rest of Europe seemed by common consent to take no notice of them. And all the while each one, and the contents of its pocket, was, like

enough—so thought Mr. Challis—the centre of an incubation of memories that were to last a lifetime. "As they bake, so they will brew," philosophized Mr. Challis to himself, and clouded over a little as he remembered that he, too, was in the twenties once. Four of them played lawn-tennis that afternoon, and the others got somehow lost sight of. No matter!

Lady Arkroyd had the carriage, and drove over to Thanes Castle, to see the Duchess of Rankshire before the Royalties came. But she wasn't at all sure she wouldn't have done something else if she had known that Judith was going to cry off at the last minute. She relied a good deal on her eldest daughter as a factor in social intercourse. But she didn't confess it.

"What on earth is the girl going to do with herself? How can you be so tiresome, Ju? Now do just get ready and come. There's no hurry. I can wait."

"Now, Madre dear, you really ought to know by this time how bored I always am with the sort of people they get at the Castle. And I've got letters to write. I must answer Lady Kitty about the orchids."

"Nonsense, girl! You can't be all the afternoon over *that*."

"I shall go out later. In an hour or so. I dare say I shall take Mr.—what's his name?—Harris—round the village and show him the Roman Camp. He'll know what castrametation means, and things . . ."

"Mr. 'Titus Scroop'? My dear!—he's as happy as he can be talking to that idiot Brownrigg about Metaphysics and nonsense. Do let him alone!"

"Well!—I dare say I shall. Or otherwise, as may be. But I won't come to Thanes. Love to the Duchess."

Judith was a stronger character than her mother, and won. As the latter was driven off, she said to herself, for no apparent reason, "Mr. Titus Scroop."

Lady Arkroyd was in the habit of asking every celebrity she came across to her home, because she worshipped genius. But she took the genius for granted if she saw any author, artist, or musician's name often enough in print. Was she sometimes rash? Well—yes—sometimes! Perhaps a doubt about "Titus Scroop's" genius was the reason she said his name. But if so, why did it lead to a resolve in her mind to ask Mrs. Candour—*the* Mrs. Candour of the moment, whom she was sure to meet at Thanes—more about Mrs. "Titus Scroop"? She kept thinking of it, off and on, all the way to the park gates with the dragon-sentinels on piers on each side presenting arms.

And all the while Challis was being bored by that idiot Brownrigg, and wishing anyone would come and rescue him. He resented the idea that he had any special rescuer in view. But no one had said he had. However, Miss Arkroyd had certainly spoken about a walk to the Roman Camp; so naturally he would cast her for the part, don't you see?

CHAPTER VI

OF THE GRAUBOSCHIAN PHILOSOPHY. HOW JUDITH ARKROYD WALKED WITH MR. CHALLIS TO THE RECTORY. HOW HE SAID NOTHING ABOUT HIS WIFE BEING HIS DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER. HOW HE WAS OUT OF HIS ELEMENT AT THE RECTORY. SALADIN AND HIS CAT. HIS HEDGEHOG

THE gentleman spoken of so disrespectfully by his hostess was Mr. Adolphus Brownrigg, who was an enthusiastic disciple of the great German philosopher Graubosch, whose scheme embodied a complete Reorganization of Society on an entirely new basis. But whereas all previous reorganizers of Society had started on the fallacious and mischievous line of breaking up existing institutions and replacing them by others of their own devising, this reformer proposed to utilize them all as portions of his new System. Thus the reigning Sovereign would fall easily into his place of Chairman of a great Central Committee of Management, retaining the Crown as a distinguishing badge of his office; the existing machinery of Parliamentary election would answer equally well for the Members of the Central Committee; the Bench would supply us with a most satisfactory staff for what he termed Courts of Discriminative Decision, and so on, and so on. Even the very Policemen's Uniforms would be available for the new staff of Order-Keepers and Crime-Preventors that formed part of his System. Nay, the Coinage itself would come in useful as Exchangeable Tokens in his new Method of Sale and Purchase Accommodation.

"What attitude does Professor Graubosch adopt towards the Religions of the world?" asked Challis, as he and the advocate of this new Reform walked about the garden, discussing it.

"Graubosch," replied the latter, "is, broadly speaking, in favour of their complete abolition. Nor do I myself think any continuation of them would be found necessary in view of his new System of Metaphysical Checks. No one recognizes more fully than Graubosch the necessity for Moral Restraint derived from a Consciousness of the Unseen, whether acting as a stimulus in connection with an exalted and unselfish anxiety for personal rewards throughout Eternity, or as a deterrent resulting from the anticipa-

tion of unpleasantness hereafter, especially of continuous oxidation with evolution of caloric. But the new System provides for both."

"As for instance? . . ."

"For instance, in respect of the Idea of a Deity. . . . But perhaps, Mr. Challis, your own views on this subject are . . . a . . . well defined? I should be sorry to . . . to . . ."

"To give offence? Pray don't feel any scruples on my account."

"Well, I will continue. In respect of this Idea of a Deity, it is true that Graubosch abolishes God, as such. But his System claims to provide a substitute; and this substitute is, to my thinking, superior in many respects for working purposes to the Idea it displaces. The first Metaphysical Check he formulates is the Invariable Necessary Antecedent. The acceptance of this as an inevitable condition of thought is an essential of the System of Graubosch."

"How does it act as a check?"

"It is rather long to follow out; but, put as briefly as I can, it is somewhat thus: Graubosch admits the possibility of an infinite number of successions of Antecedents, as we have an infinite number of results or sequents. But the effect on the Metaphysician of contemplating such a condition of the Universe is fatal to reasoning, and may easily produce suspension of the faculties. Philosophy stipulates for a *modus vivendi;* and as a working necessity for argument, if for no other reason, Graubosch refers the whole of the Universe to *one* Invariable Necessary Antecedent; which he accepts, for reasons which appear to me satisfactory, as obviously superior to any one unit of its results or sequences. We have no right, he says, to assume that *any* result or consequence is not achievable by such an Antecedent."

"I concur, on the whole. Does Graubosch ascribe intelligence, in our sense of the word, to this Antecedent?"

"Certainly not. Intelligence is merely a sequence or consequence of some minute fraction . . . of . . . of its power."

"Why did you hesitate?"

"From a feeling that Power itself may only be a finite humanism, so to speak—an Entity on all fours with Intelligence. But the Metaphysician has to leave himself a few words, to speak with. Now the idea of *greater* and *less* is axiomatic, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that *our* Intelligence is a lesser thing than its working substitute in the Invariable and Necessary Antecedent."

"I quite understand. To create Intelligence, its Creator when

creating himself must go one better—break his own anticipated record. What are Graubosch's views about Good and Evil? They both are factors in our existing System, especially the latter."

"He ignores both, as antiquated and unnecessary. In his System, the fruitless discussions about which is which—where one ends and the other begins, and so on—disappear entirely."

"That sounds good. Vice and Virtue could shake hands over it—a Coalition Ministry, don't you know?"

"Pardon me!—the exact reverse. Party Government would be intensified. But I ought to describe what Graubosch terms the *Plus* and *Minus* of his System, in its Moral or Ethical aspects. The first expression recognizes in what has been hitherto absurdly called 'Good' merely the Invariable and Necessary Antecedent leaking out, so to speak, and becoming perceptible to our Senses. The second, in what has been equally absurdly called 'Evil,' its diminution or repression."

Challis yawned. He was getting bored. "Does not that," he said, "assume the existence of some counter-power, able to diminish and repress?"

"Graubosch avoids doing so. And therein lies the beauty of his System. His *Minus* is simply negation of his *Plus*. An exact parallel is supplied by the phenomena of light and darkness. To ascribe to darkness powers of extinguishing light is scientifically absurd."

"I see." Challis spoke in a winding-up tone. His bore perceived it, and dexterously pinioned him.

"Pardon me one moment more," he said, "We are at a point where the beauty of the System becomes most manifest. I refer to its elasticity—its power of utilizing, provisionally at any rate, existing Institutions pending its maturer development. Graubosch does not doubt the efficacy at some future date of the Metaphysical Check on our propensities supplied by the *Plus* and *Minus* of his System. But he proposes for the present—at least, until believers in a Personal God from early youth have had time to die out—to postpone the *Plus* which is to take his place. Also—and this is important in connection with the operation of Metaphysical Checks—he is favourable to the retention of a Personal Devil until the Masses have acquired an insight into Metaphysics. . . ."

"I must ask you to excuse me," said Mr. Challis. "I have letters to write, and they say the Post goes at twelve. . . ."

"But I hope I have impressed you favourably. We must bear in mind . . ."

"Most favourably, my dear sir. And it seems to me that if we

only let things alone vigorously enough, we may regard Professor Graubosch's great Reform as already in operation. . . ." Mr. Challis paused on behalf of a newcomer, to whom he resumed: "Not at all, Miss Arkroyd . . . not the least! I assure you Mr. Brownrigg and I have talked the subject dry. . . . No!—I really am speaking the truth." This with absolute fervour.

"Because I do so hate interrupting," said Judith, who had been waiting to speak. "And I saw you were so interested. But I can say what I have to say and go—and then you can finish." Mr. Challis looked dejected, and Judith continued: "I only wanted to say that I shall be walking down to the village presently, and could show you the Roman and British camps and the prehistoric monolith." Mr. Challis looked elated. "Only *presently,* when you have really had your talk out. I shall be on the terrace." Mr. Challis was just on the point of arresting Miss Arkroyd's departure by another violent profession of intense completion of the subject in hand, when prudence murmured in his ear that his bore mustn't be allowed to come too. Now a pretence that he was yearning for three words more, and would then meet the lady on the terrace, just served to place Mr. Brownrigg in the position of a fixture. It localized him. Otherwise he might have moved with the train of events, unshaken off. Even as it was, a very vigorous "I really mustn't keep Miss Arkroyd waiting any longer" was wanted to effect the extraction—for it was quite like tooth-drawing. But the force of handling—as the art-critics phrase it—was so strong that Mr. Brownrigg couldn't say, "Why shouldn't I come too, I should like to know?" He *would* have, nevertheless. But he had to give the point up, and went to look for Mr. Wraxall.

Judith was waiting on the terrace looking handsome. She was wrestling with an intractable glove-button, and her hand that was operative was embarrassed by her sunshade having been taken into its confidence. Mr. Challis could hold the sunshade, clearly. A very simple thing! And when the glove-button socketed into its metallic nidus, and was satisfactory, how obvious for the young lady to take that sunshade back again, with a profusion of thanks as for a great service done! But did the little incident leave the two performers exactly where it found them? Sometimes things of this sort don't. Things of what sort, do you ask? Well!—you see, we are watching Mr. Alfred Challis's mind, and can, for the present, only answer—the sort that made that gentleman conscious that the twenties and he had parted company many years ago.

Perhaps, however, it's only one of those nonsensical ideas Sibyl

gets (now, if you please, we are peering into the lady's mind) when she tells her sister that flirtations with married men are detestable. However, this time Sibyl couldn't have a word to say—a literary man with an attenuated beard, and hair that seems to have thought of curling once, and then thought better of it, and gone a little gray hesitatingly! And a weak mouth! And a lay-down collar! And such clothes! No!—this time Sibyl could find no excuse. If this man wasn't safe, you might as well have no male friends or even acquaintances at all, and live in a harem.

Besides, there was something very interesting about his eyes and forehead, which were his good points. Oh yes!—his hands were not bad. They looked sensitive, and showed the bones. Judith's mind made swift excursion down a side-alley. What was the impossible Mrs. Challis like to live with, she wondered? Did he adore her, or how? Perhaps she wasn't really a "good soul" at all, but adorable—in reason.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Challis. I always get into such a mess with buttons. I hope you are not afraid of dogs, because Saladin must come with us. He never gets any exercise unless I take him out." A huge Danish boarhound, conscious that he was spoken of, looked up and appeared to sanction the use of his name. He had smelt Mr. Challis, and found some excuse for him, presumably, in some nicety of bouquet human nostrils know not of.

"Saladin's welcome," said he. "But I'm like Br'er Rabbit—a mighty puny man myself, and I may very easily git trompled. . . ." For Saladin was appalling.

"What's that out of?"

"Uncle Remus."

"I suppose I ought to read Uncle Remus?"

"Yes; but don't if you don't like."

"Not if I ought to?"

"The ought is not a high moral ought. You ought to read Uncle Remus if you want something amusing to read."

"I haven't much time for reading, and I want to read 'The Epidermis.' Everyone tells me I shall enjoy it."

"Perhaps everyone knows. I don't feel so much confidence myself. Read Uncle Remus first, anyhow. If you do that, I'll ask you to accept a copy of t'other one, from the Author."

"I've just written off for a copy to the publisher."

"Oh!—have you?—I would tell him to transfer the order to my account—only that takes all the edge off the proceeding."

"When did Uncle Remus come out first?"

"Oh—a long time ago! It's odd to think how long. I'm over forty. I was almost a boy."

"Perhaps that's why you liked it so much? Fancy your being fourteen years older than me!"

"Perhaps." The last half of Miss Arkroyd's remark had to go without answer. It was too parenthetical to call for one.

Experience teaches us that there is no meshwork of circumstance into which flatter conversation may weave itself than the combination of a married man, a young woman, and a walk out on a fine afternoon, of set purpose. At least, that was the text of a literary reflection of Mr. Challis at this juncture. He put it away in a mental storehouse for his next book. Its truth or falsehood is immaterial at present.

Judith made no mental note of what *her* experience taught; but she knew she couldn't stand being bored and she felt it coming. She had made up her mind to have an amusing walk with this popular favourite. And Sibyl might say what she liked, but she wouldn't be balked!

A sense of intended impertinence may have heightened her colour slightly, as she stopped and turned the fine eyes full on to her companion. He stopped, too, looking round.

"Mr. Challis, I want you to tell me something. . . . No!—don't promise till you know what it is. . . ."

"I am sure, Miss Arkroyd, you will ask me nothing I should hesitate to tell you. . . ."

"Don't be too confident . . . it's very impertinent!"

"All right—go on! I'll forgive you."

"Is 'Ziz' in the 'Spendthrift's Legacy' Mrs. Challis?"

"My wife? Marianne?" Mr. Challis was conscious of being reminded of his wife. A fine *nuance* of ashamedness—it could hardly be called shame—affected his mind, surely? Else why note the perfectly obvious fact that if he and Marianne were never to forget each other for a single instant, life would be insupportable to both. Perhaps he can hardly be said to have noted it, though; suppose we say that he declined to note it, consciously, because of its absurd irrelevance.

"Yes!—Marianne." Judith's eyes, with no concession in them of any shade of impertinence in the use of Mrs. Challis's Christian name, waited for the answer, as she still stood, not stirring. Was she saying to herself that this was tit-for-tat; a *riposte* for his "Sibyl" of their talk in the morning? Saladin, not used to this sort of thing, waited also, reproachfully. Challis, rather accepting "Marianne" as a sanction of his "Sibyl," was again conscious

that his soul was being brushed by machinery—not an intrusive brush though; an easy one he could ignore. His answer was not difficult.

"Not a particle of resemblance between them! Ziz was a"—he stopped himself just in time—"a . . . a . . . almost a sort of professional beauty." The one word "professional" made all the difference—saved the position.

Now, Judith had a habit of despising dangerous ground in social intercourse; it was part of what Mr. Challis had called her *prepotente* disposition. She would always put her horse at a quickset hedge if any image crossed her mind of the finger of Discretion, the monitress; especially if it looked like Sibyl's. While Mr. Challis was breathing freely about his dexterous escape, she made up her mind to know all about this impossible person who wasn't a professional beauty. As to how she should get at this knowledge, that was another matter. All she could see her way to at the moment was—not to be in a hurry and spoil her chances. But she was very much mistaken if she couldn't do with this man, whom she thought of as nerves and brains and very little else, what she had done before now with stronger men than he—viz., twist him round her little finger.

"Ah!—I'm so glad," said she. And then, as though to clothe her pause in walking with the semblance of a moment of mental tension, she resumed movement forward. Saladin emphasized her action by a single tremendous bark, and did the same. A startled waterfowl decided that his position was untenable, and condemned the neighbourhood, going off in a bee-line with a rush. Two horses out at grass galloped round their field, and stood at gaze, with open nostrils. Of which events Saladin, their source and origin, took no notice, but moved on, smelling the planet gently and thoughtfully.

"Why are you glad?" asked Challis. "You didn't like Ziz, I suppose?" A note of pique in his voice. The young lady's confidence about the finger-twisting grew.

"I *admired* her," she said with marked emphasis. "She fascinated me down to the ground. But . . . if you ask me . . . you mustn't mind my saying, you know . . ."

"I can't tell you how I enjoy hearing what you really think. No compliments, please!"

"Well . . . if I can express myself! I should say your heroine's was rather a . . . rather a . . . *shrill* personality. I don't mean unlovable exactly, but . . . well! . . . I can't think of any other way of putting it."

"She was meant to be excitable. Neurotic, as the slang goes

nowadays. Marianne is neither. I hope you liked the reconciliation scene by the open grave, and the way they appeal, as it were, to the coffin for forgiveness. Some of the reviews thought it strained."

"Strained!—oh no! It seemed to me in some ways one of the most touching things I ever read. And her explanation to Septimus that she had divorced him on principle in order that he should marry Julia, and both get a chance of recovering their position in society. . . . But do tell me—only it's hardly fair to ask—did you mean that *she* put the arsenic in Julia's coffee, or the negress?"

"I leave that an open question for the reader to speculate about. But you may rest assured of one thing, Miss Arkroyd—the young person in my novel is about as unlike my dear wife as she can be." He had determined to pay some little tribute to his dear wife as soon as the chance came, that she should lie less upon his conscience. Here it was. "Marianne is the exact opposite—a pussycat upon the hearthrug—a . . . kettle singing on the hob, you might almost say. She's not exactly what's called a clever woman, certainly. . . ."

"But she is none the worse for that! How I do hate clever women!" All the same, Judith thought to herself: "Why couldn't he leave her in peace, on the hearthrug or the hob?" His last reservation had spoiled his little tribute, and indeed, he felt it himself. Bother!

Setting it right would make it worse. In spite of a fervent murmur from the young lady, that she felt she knew exactly what Mrs. Challis was like, and that they would be sure to understand each other, and what a pity it was Mrs. Challis had not been able to come, he felt he would do best to *brusquer* the conversation. He couldn't well say "Marianne isn't here because your mother never invited her—only told her she might come." So, feeling that if he could detach the conversation from Marianne personally he did not very much care by what means the end was effected, he made a fragmentary remark to the effect that he *had* had an orginal in his mind for the neurotic heroine, but quite a different person from his wife—utterly unlike her. "Unlike in appearance—individuality—everything! Is that the market-cross?" No, it wasn't the market-cross; it was the pump. So Mr. Challis's conclusion did very little towards its object.

Judith halted as before, after establishing the pump. She knew she was going to be impertinent again, and drawled a word or two to that effect, to get on a safe footing. "But do forgive me,"

she said, "if I ask who the lady was. You needn't tell me, you know." And then, as Challis wavered between disclosure and concealment, put in a word to clinch matters: "Treat me as a friend. We can always quarrel, you know!" The soul-brush seemed to go a little quicker.

This author was a man who fancied he understood womankind—and probably his was a fair average of knowledge in a department where so much ignorance exists. But there was one sort of woman he could *not* understand—the woman with a stronger nature than his own. He had only mixed with his equals, so far. He could be quite unaware that he was being influenced—could still persuade himself, as a tribute to his manhood, that he was acting from a politic motive. He could make an astute note that his insight into humanity—"Human Nature . . . behooves that I know it"—showed him that he could place confidence in this lady. It had nothing to do with her eyes or her outline. It was his Insight.

"I don't mind telling you." A slight hitch before the last word showed that the speaker had just avoided italics. He paused a moment, to be quite sure he didn't mind, then continued: "The original of 'Ziz' was my first wife. So far as there *was* an original. But exaggerated out of all—out of all individuality."

"I never knew that you had been married before." The wording of this—"never" during the last forty-eight hours!—was ahead of their intimacy, but her hearer accepted it. It chimed in with that luxury of the soul-brush, always at work. He would not on any account have had it exchanged for, "They did not tell me you had been married twice." Nevertheless, he was unaware that he was being influenced, and went on towards expansive confidence, unsuspicious of himself.

"I married about fourteen years ago, and lost my wife within a twelvemonth. My son is a big boy now, at Rugby; he was born just before his mother died. He always thinks and speaks of Marianne as his mother. She has always been a mother to him, in fact. Her own children—we have two little girls—do not realize his half-brothership. We have never tried to make them do so."

"How right!" from Judith. Confidence was improving. She was giving sanction to family arrangements.

"Yes, I think it has been best. Their difference of age suggests nothing to them."

"I suppose they know?"

"Yes—academically, one might say. But knowledge of that is as nothing against the force of a child's acceptance of its *status*

quo. When I married Marianne, the boy—he's Bob—was still too young to pay much attention to the fact that she brought him away from his granny's to live at my house. The only difference that impresses him between himself and his sisters is that *he* can remember so much more clearly than they do the house where my first wife and I used to live. It is the house described in 'The Spendthrift's Legacy.' I shall always believe it was that title that made it so fetching. You see, you can't guess whether the Spendthrift inherited the legacy or bequeathed it. It gets on your brain, and then you ask for it at Mudie's. . . ."

Judith interrupted. "Of course, the Spendthrift *left* the Legacy. But why was he a Spendthrift, one wants to know. . . . Yes, I see. It was a lucky title. But did you always write?"

"Not until the firm of accountants I was with wound up the affairs of Eatwell and Lushington, the big publishers. I was sent to check and overhaul the stock. An almost unsold novel attracted my attention—an edition of two thousand—fifteen hundred in sheets. Its issue had been arrested by the discovery that the author—who had just died of appendicitis, by-the-bye—had taken another man's title."

"I suppose you can be prosecuted for taking another man's title?"

"H'm—no! At least, there is no copyright in a title. It wasn't that. It was for the book's own sake. Publishers don't like other people's titles for their books. I was able to offer a suggestion which made it possible to use the sheets. The bound copies were made paper-pulp of again, I believe."

"I can't see much encouragement to authorship in that, Mr. Challis."

"None at all. But Mr. Saxby, who is virtually Eatwell and Lushington—one's dead, and the other has become a missionary in Marocco—saw reason to believe I should succeed as a writer, owing to the new first chapter I wrote for this book to accommodate the new title. He made me write a novel for the firm, and I succeeded."

"But I don't understand. Wasn't the old title printed anywhere on the old sheets?"

"Printed everywhere! The novel was called 'Amaris,' and there were no headlines. The page-tops were just Amaris, Amaris, Amaris all through."

"What is 'Amaris'? And how on earth did you manage? . . ."

"Stop a bit, or I shall want Gargantua's mouth. 'Amaris' was

a name the author concocted, like Mrs. Kenwig's 'Morleena.' He wanted to be quite sure his heroine's name had never been used for a novel before, so that he could make it the title. But it *had*, with a Latin subtitle, in which *dulcibus* and *amaris* were put in contrast. . . ."

"Never mind the Latin," said Judith. "What did it mean?"

"It amounted to the question, 'Is Life most full of bitter things or sweet?' and the title answered the question. It might have been called 'Dulcibus' for any light it threw on the problem. But it wouldn't have sold. Nothing sells without a snarl or a howl or a pig-sty in it."

"But I'm so curious to know how you got over the difficulty."

"Simple enough! We turned it into 'Tamarisk.' . . . How? Why, of course, by printing a 'T' at the beginning and a 'K' at the end. It cost something to run the sheets carefully through again, but not so much as burning them."

"What was there about 'Tamarisk' in the book?"

"Not a word till I rewrote the first dozen pages. I had to read that blessed book through till I nearly knew it by heart, in order to work out the idea. But it seemed all right when it was done. I was rather proud of it."

"I dare say it was tremendously clever. But how *was* it done? That's what I want to know."

"I made the name of the girl 'Tamarisk' instead of 'Amaris,' and then her baby brother can't pronounce it—calls her Amaris; and the family catch the pronunciation, and she adopts the name outright. It was difficult to do, because the conditions implied were those of the bosom of an affectionate family, and the sequel might have clashed. . . ."

"Because . . .?"

"Well, you see, the girl becomes a Vampire, and sucks the little brother's blood. But I succeeded. In fact, I think the very difficulties of the situation produced a certain pathos."

"I see," said Judith, with a gush of intense perception. "I see that would be so. . . . Yes, that *is* the market-cross, this time."

Is the gap above large enough to include an inspection of a market-cross, a pump, a camp, and a village church? Perhaps, considering how little was left of the last—though, of course, some of the walls had ancient invisible cores. But hardly for tea at the Rectory, which had to be fresh-made; rather like the church, though in the case of the latter a few of the old leaves were preserved from the first brew, so to speak. Poor old leaves!—poor

conscious objects of active conservation, each paroxysm of which left a little less of the flavour of the *moyen âge* behind it—a shadow less of excuse for another subscription list on their behalf, or another paper in the Journal of the local Society of Antiquaries. They were being handed down to posterity with such solicitude that whatever of bloom the axe and hammer of Puritanism had left behind seemed like to come off on the gloves of Ecclesiastical Archæology.

Is it necessary to say that the foregoing is only a peep into the ill-regulated mind of Mr. Alfred Challis at about the time that the fresh-made tea at the Rectory had begun to reanimate it? But, of course, Mr. Challis never said a word to this effect to his host, and that reverend gentleman naturally didn't want to talk about local matters. He was sick of his interesting surroundings, and wanted to hear about the new motor-car and wireless telegraphy and aerostation and coloured photography, and all sorts of things that were up-to-date three years ago, and for that matter are still, to a certain extent. About which and other things the literary gentleman was silent and absent-minded, in spite of the tea. Had he been bound to account to himself for this, he would have found it very difficult to do so. Not being bound, he allowed his mind to recognize the fact that he never did talk much to Parsons—you could never be sure you wouldn't give offence!—and to feel that reserve, short of incivility of course, was plausible at least.

For he was one of those unpractical persons who, never having been thrashed into a Creed in childhood, and being liberally ready to doubt any Creed of his own concoction, associated Religions, broadly speaking, with the opening or closing of shops on Sunday, the suppression of bands in the parks, and the singing of the same tune over and over again in unison at street-corners. When he came by chance on the sound of a harmonium making an unintelligible droning, he conceived of it as Christianity going on in a corner, fraught with a quaint old-world feeling to the passer-by, but scarcely to be encouraged by enlightenment. He had cultivated Ritual so far as to be ready, on emergency, to take off his hat and look intently into it, watching anxiously the while for subsidence of religious symptoms without. At old-fashioned houses, where Prayers might be expected to occur at any moment, he used to become in a sense demoralised, and felt lost when he found himself out of reach of a chair or convenient *prie-Dieu* of some sort. His only really heart-felt expression of gratitude to his own or anyone else's Maker was the "Thank God that's over!"

that he didn't say aloud at the end. Messiahs of all ranks, from the highest to the lowest, he regarded as mere bones of contention along interminable sectaries, all ready to fang each other, but kept in check by Scotland Yard. Qualified practitioners of Religion, whether Priest or Presbyter, he looked on as mere survivals of a past age perishing slowly of Civilization. He was not prepared to take the responsibility of hurrying their extinction, and, indeed, was ready to make concession on minor points, complying in literature with the public conviction that the pronoun standing for the name of the Maker of the Stellar Universe, and possibly others, really ought to be printed with a capital letter. We are merely putting him on record—not hinting at any opinion how far he was right or wrong.

Why do we call Mr. Alfred Challis *unpractical?* it may be asked. Simply because, while he avoided or ignored all experts in Applied Religion, he himself was unprepared with any substitute for it. And this was so even in the case of his own children. He had, however, given *carte blanche,* by implication of supineness, to the partner of his joys, sorrows, and admixtures of the two. He knew perfectly well that if he could have cancelled the little restored church at Royd, and the Parsonage and all its belongings, and left Royd free from what he counted superstition, of a sort, he would have held his hand—simply because he could not for the life of him have suggested any alternative that would not have worked round to the same thing in the end. He was convinced at heart, even while he made mental notes about Clerical Humbugs who pretended to believe what they knew German criticism had exploded long ago—for Mr. Challis had read whatever fostered his predispositions, just like yourself and the present writer—that if this athletic-looking, upright gentleman and his serious sister—for it seemed he was a widower—were to be suddenly removed from Royd, as well as any religious outscourings of a Dissenting nature hanging about—if all these were cleared away and the village left in charge of the human heart and intellect *ed id genus omne,* the human stomach *et istud genus omne* would get their way in double-quick time, and a perfect Saturnalia would come about of Bacchus and Priapus, of Cabiric deformities lurking round the corner for a chance, and Beer. At any rate, he was enough convinced of this to be rather grateful to the Clerical Humbugs for pretending, pending enlightenment. He felt it was benevolent in him to be mean at the cost of his own conscience, and to hold his tongue and leave them undenounced, in the interest of Humanity.

This chronicle has no opinions—note that! The foregoing is

only a peep into the mind of a literary man who was never at a University. Had he been at one, many college-chums in Orders would have checked his condemnations. The man one has read with, swum with, cricketed with—*cannot* be a Hypocrite. Absurd!

Our snapshots of Mr. Alfred Challis's mind have taken long to record, but they serve their turn in this place better, perhaps, than the few trifling incidents of the visit at the Rectory. Consider that the lady and gentleman are on their way back to the Hall, in a golden sunset-light which makes the former resplendent, and does no harm to the appearance of the latter. Judith weighs him more carefully than she has done yet, and the result may be more favourable in such a glow. Quite passable!—is her verdict. And she knows how *she* looks, bless you, reasoning by analogy! For all her previous verdicts about her companion's looks—so far as they were favourable—have run on lines of intellectual rather than physical beauty.

The reason she looked at him carefully at that moment of starting from the Parsonage may have been because of an impression she had that he had cut a poor figure as against that of the Parson. It had so chanced that Saladin, who had behaved well in the house—accepting small sweet biscuits with reserves as to first approval of them—had, on coming away through the garden, just as they reached the gate, become aware of cats, as an abstraction. Mr. Challis's hold on his collar he hardly took any notice of; and it was fortunate that the Rev. Athelstan Taylor (that was his name) got hold on the other side just in time to prevent Saladin starting for a concrete cat over the flower-beds. "You had, perhaps, best let me have both sides, Mr. Challis," said he. Then had followed a magnificent contest between the Rev. Athelstan and the boarhound. If the former could have been unfrocked, it would have been a Greek bas-relief. It ended in a draw, as the concrete cat vanished. "I couldn't have held you much longer, old chap," said the Rector unassumingly to Saladin, during apologies and explanations, dogwise. These continued for some time after they had left the Rectory, and Judith was really glad Saladin's chain was on, with no one to help stronger than her literary friend, if a cat occurred. Rabbits had palled on Saladin, owing to their absurd and unfair practice of running underground.

"He's a fine fellow, your Parson, Miss Arkroyd," said Challis. He acknowledged it readily; athletics were not his line.

"The Reverend Athelstan? (Yes, my darling precious pet, you did quite right, and it was an odious cat!) Oh yes—he was a

great athlete in his old Oxford days; was in the 'Varsity eight. (Yes, dear love!—you shall lick when we get home. Now walk quiet, and let people talk.) Yes—he's painfully strong." There was something in this of implied justification for people who were not.

"I'm afraid I'm painfully weak—by comparison. My sedentary employments don't develop the muscles." But, after all, reading prayers and singing of anthems does not, either. This was *in foro conscientiæ*—not spoken aloud.

"Oh, everybody can't Sandow. *I* think that sort of thing rather tiresome, carried too far. However, we are very good friends, the Reverend and I. I like a man that has the courage of his opinions. He's quite in a minority here about the Woman question—or I suppose I should say questions. But I meant the Franchise business particularly. He and the Bishop are at daggers drawn about it. I haven't heard him say much about the other. I fancy, though, he's at heart in favour of it—more than myself, perhaps. I mean the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill."

"Are not you . . .?" Mr. Challis had a hesitation on him, not like his usual way of speech. That was an amused way usually, a confident one almost always. This was neither.

"I must confess . . ." said Judith hesitatingly—"I must confess to having very little sympathy with men who want to marry their deceased wives' sisters. It's a question of taste, according to me—nothing to do with the high moralities." The implied sneer against all moral law was no discomfort to her hearer. On the contrary, spoken as it was by a good-looking young lady in a sunset light, it seemed to him alike picturesque and liberal. But he changed the conversation suddenly, as though something in it had disagreed with him.

"What a capital photographer the great Athelstan seems to be!" He said it with a definite air of "Let us talk of something else." She glanced round at him, decided with some surprise that she had shocked him, but answered without showing it. She was quite a woman of the world, was Judith.

"He's a splendid photographer. You know he took all those photos for 'Ten Years of Slum Growth'—my cousin's book?" Mr. Challis pretended he knew this book; but he didn't. "I made him come and photograph my own special slum population in Tallack Street. But Lady Elizabeth wouldn't have them in the book. She said Tallack Street could hardly rank as a slum, in her sense of the word."

"Was it too swell?"

'She said so. Well!—you shall see the photographs, and judge for yourself."

But the conversation had fallen flat. A chill had come. Even the discovery that the moon had risen when we were not looking did nothing to remove it. We were not young enough, probably, or not old enough, for lunar influences. Indifference to Phœbe begins with maturity, and even outlasts it. So thought Mr. Challis, when rather mechanically called on to admire the silver disc, shot with gold, just getting clear of a purple gloom that was the hallowed smoke of unholy Grime—hallowed by the sun's last word to twilight, its heir-at-law and sole executor. For all that, Mr. Challis made notes in this connection for literary purposes, while Judith thought to herself that this would never do. She must make an effort, or the skein she was going to twist round her finger would float away and be lost.

"I know I shocked you just now," said she.

"Shocked me?—when?"

"Just before we got to the photography. . . ."

"I have quite forgotten. What were we saying?" This was not true; he remembered perfectly.

"How kind of you to pretend to forget! Forgive my disbelieving you."

Challis was open to a recrudescence of veracity. Perhaps it *was* a fib this time—he made the admission. But as he made it, he was again conscious of the soul-brush at work. Had he perceived the skein-analogy, he might have recognized its first clip round the finger. "We were talking of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, I think," said he. "But why you think you shocked me I can't imagine."

"Never mind!—if you don't recollect. But Sibyl would have lectured me. She always says I ridicule Moral Law. Perhaps I do, in a certain sense. But Sibyl is the soul of propriety."

"I can't see where ridicule of Moral Law comes in, so far. What you *said* was—well!—amounted to a condemnation of the *taste* of men who wish to marry their wives' sisters. Perhaps I misunderstood?" Challis's manner had a flavour of personal interest; the amused tone had gone, and the last words ended on a pause for an answer, with an intention in them of hearing it and going on. The skein would run on easily from now, said the winder. But not too quick at first.

"Oh no!—quite right," she said. "I meant that. For instance—I shouldn't mention this, only I see you guessed it. You are so quick at guessing things. . . ."

"I'm not. What do you suppose I have guessed?"

"Why—about the Reverend Athelstan, of course, and Elizabeth Caldecott. . . ."

"Elizabeth who?"

"Well—you *saw* her, just now!"

"I thought she was his sister?"

"Oh, no!—sister-in-law."

"What were you saying about them—just now? You began 'For instance,' and pulled up. . . ."

"I was going to say theirs was a case in point. If Mr. Taylor wanted to marry Miss Caldecott, I should consider it simply a lapse from good taste on his part. I shouldn't fret over the moralities. He and Bishop Barham would have to fight that out between them. . . . Oh dear!—what *has* Saladin got? I'm afraid it's a hedgehog. *Do* you think you could keep hold of him, just for a few seconds, while I throw it out of his reach?" This was achieved with difficulty; all the greater from a misconception of the position by Saladin, who thought it was all done for his sake, as a relaxation. The hedgehog was thrown over a long high wall, and Saladin ran along it each way, leaping up at intervals.

"He gets so irritated with hedgehogs, and I don't wonder, poor darling! I hope he hasn't strained your hand?" Mr. Challis couldn't say very much about that. Nothing to speak of! "Let's go on. He'll get tired of that, and I don't hear the bull anywhere—it's all right. What was I saying?" It is perturbing to the non-bucolic mind to hear a necessary and inevitable bull taken as a matter of course.

"You were speaking of Mr. Taylor and Miss Caldecott. Is he supposed to want to marry her?"

"I really couldn't say. Men are so odd. Of course, if she were less angular . . ." The young lady blew a whistle for Saladin. The intentness with which both watched for the dog to appear from the quarter he was last seen in enabled him to play off a little joke at their expense. For when Challis turned his head, after much watching and whistling, there was that confounded beast, pretending all the while to wait, after a brief circuit of a mile or so out of sight. He made a pretence of not being able to understand motives, combined with great forbearance in not asking for an explanation of them.

The skein-winding had been a little spoiled, but Judith got it again in order before arriving at the Hall, and it would wait for its opportunity. Her mere acceptance of silence in the twilight of the great avenue, as though conversation-making was not called for

under the circumstances, had its force. It might have been spoiled by a quicker pace, to finish the walk up; but, if anything, there was a disposition to loiter and to hate the idea of being indoors on such a heavenly evening.

"Your wife's name was . . .?" Surely the subject franked a dropped voice, in harmony with the beauty of the said evening—a touch of tenderness for *its* sake entirely. None but a coarse nature would shout against the musical hushing of the wind in the beeches. Let there be no false note in the chord.

Challis accepted this tenderness as a tribute to the departed. He answered, "Kate—Kate Verrall." He need have said no more, but it filled out a sympathetic funeral tone, in keeping with the hour, to add: "She died within two years of our first meeting."

Miss Arkroyd's regret at having raked up a painful memory was so great that she all but laid her hand on her companion's sleeve. "Oh no," she said, still more tenderly, "I did not mean that. I meant Marianne's maiden name." It would have been artificial, and stodgy, too, to call her "your present wife." Better the frankness of a sympathetic nature, and Marianne.

"Craik," was the unqualified answer. Challis wished that his first wife's mother, when she married again, had chosen someone with a more rhythmic name, not to interfere with the general feeling of the foreground and middle distance. For, you see, she then provided this maiden name for the second Mrs. Alfred Challis, whose mother she was also. Mr. Challis had married his deceased wife's half-sister, and would stand condemned—presumably, at least, in the eyes of his companion—for bad taste certainly, possibly worse. He repeated the name, rather crisply, in correction of Judith's first understanding of it as "Blake," but never a word said he, there and then, about Marianne's half-sistership with the original of "Ziz." Was he bound to say anything?

He departed to his room, to dress for dinner, with a disjointed, incomplete feeling that he was rather glad that a mere *au revoir* had involved no handshake. Could he have trusted himself not to emphasize its pressure unduly? Faugh!—where was the sense of such an imbecile speculation, or the need for it? He was angry with himself for the thought—angry at the way he had enjoyed his walk with "that girl." He brushed her off his mind discourteously as "that girl." Why, he had only known her a couple of days! He even found that an impulse of his wanted him to say, "Damn all these people! What are they to me, or I to them, that they should come into my life, and make hay of a working contentment I have never dreamed of questioning?" But he refused to say it,

merely noting what its syntax would have been if he had done so. *En revanche,* he made up his mind to write a jolly long letter to Marianne to-night.

The other party—though, indeed, it is hard to say to what—retired to her room to dress, not very sorry to hear that Sibyl was not home yet. She had quite made up her mind that if her sister talked any nonsense about flirtations with married men, she would speak sharply to her—give her a piece of her mind. But she hated rows. So if the motor-car broke down—and it was pretty sure to—she shouldn't be sorry. In a day or two she was going up to London, and would go straight and call on Mrs. Challis, the Impossible one, and that would put the friendship with her husband on a footing. She would wear that white chiffon and the pearls again this evening, though; she had looked so well in them last nigt.

She herself was conscious of no inconsistency in the half-formed thoughts that passed through her mind as she stood before a mirror waiting for her maid to find the white chiffon instead of the black satin; which Sharratt, the said maid, who had found no male in the company to allot to her mistress, had placed in readiness on speculation. These thoughts can be told, but with a liberal discount. She was not the kind of woman—so they ran—that made mischief in families. That was the fascinating, tender, serpentine, insinuating kind—Becky Sharp, in fact. Intellectual friendship was her *rôle*—influence over men of genius and that sort of thing. Was Challis, as a man of genius, worth practising on? She thought he might be; as a lay figure, at any rate, if not for a specific purpose which crossed her mind at the moment. But it was to be stirred aspirations, roused sympathies. He was not the man to be worked on by Vulgar Beauty. All the same, Miss Judith knew what she was going to look like in this mirror when fully draped, when the majestic swoop of skirts should quench the abruptness of the mere petticoat. Till that came, she could fondle her fine arms and say to herself, "I'm not Becky Sharp, certainly! But to think of the mischief I could do if I put my mind to it!" And then modesty prompted a postscript, "Or any fairly good-looking woman, for that matter."

This story has no insight into motives; it only deals with actions—at least when motives are hard to get at. It is not its concern at present that Judith Arkroyd, splendid in her beauty when she chooses to make the most of it, may have much to learn about her own character—much that she does not suspect herself of. If *she* does not, why should *we?*

CHAPTER VII

OF OTHER GUESTS AND THEIR TALK. OF A SOFA-HAVEN AND HOW MISS ARKROYD PERCEIVED THAT MR. CHALLIS COULD WRITE A TRAGEDY. BEAUTY A MATTER OF OPINION

THE party that assembled that evening to dinner at Royd was smaller than usual, owing to the absence of the motorists, who had not returned. Some of the chits, too—who were never counted; they were always "those girls" or "those young people"—had vanished also, taking with them an exactly equal number of male parallel cases; for they were flirting fair—there was to be no cheating! Thus it came about that the ladies' procession to the drawing-room did not make up to half-a-dozen, and the men they left behind to smoke only just did so. But then, it was easier to talk, because there was less noise.

Scarcely had the last inch of the last lady, regarded as a total with all components included, disappeared through the door, when Mr. Challis's two friends of the morning made a simultaneous rush for a chair on either side of him. He succumbed, having no alternative, but resolved to pay absolutely no attention to anything they said. He would throw his whole soul into the enjoyment of the cigar he foresaw. There it was—in a box of ivory and *madre-perla* which Sibyl had somehow countenanced into existence, without doing anything to it herself—being brought along in a tray, abetted by cigarettes. But he would light it when he had drunk his coffee, thank you! The fact was, Mr. Challis was acquiring presence of mind, and did not spoil his opportunities now as he used to do formerly when the world of toffs was new.

Mr. Brownrigg the Grauboschite would not detain Mr. Challis more than one moment from Mr. Wraxall, the Universal Insurer; no more, in fact, than was necessary for him to emphasize a consideration he had alluded to in the morning. But he might take this opportunity of pointing out one or two inevitable inferences from that consideration which might not have occurred to his hearer.

He was better than his word, for he pointed out half-a-dozen at

least. He then went on to say that it was only fair on his part to admit the plausibility of three or four exceptions that he was well aware had been taken to those inferences. But he was prepared to demonstrate the fallacy of each of these on many different grounds, the least of which would be fatal to the pretensions of his opponents' arguments in more than one particular.

If he had stopped there, Mr. Triptolemus Wraxall would have gone in and scored; and, indeed, double-wicket would have been quite possible if Mr. Brownrigg would have played according to rule. But he wouldn't. Mr. Wraxall struggled to get a hit and a run, but scarcely succeeded.

As, with the exception of Challis and one or two others who listened and looked superior, everyone at the table became a contributor of a vigorous analysis, an irrefutable demonstration, an exhaustive enumeration, a thoughtful review, an indignant protest or a brief summary of essential facts, or was laying stress upon an important point that might easily be lost sight of, there was a great deal of noise. Challis nearly succeeded, by a powerful effort, in abstracting his mind from it and enjoying his cigar. He was able to believe that he only resorted to a speculation as to what was going on in the drawing-room as an assistance against all this chatter. That speculation had certainly nothing to do with any particular young lady whatever.

But a drowsy semi-abstraction was only achievable when the components of the Chaos were so numerous as to neutralize each other, becoming a sustained inarticulate roar. The moment a single speaker, or even two, became audible in an oasis of silence, Challis's attention was caught by his words, and divided fairly between them and what was left of the reveries they intruded on. Such an oasis was reached, as far as Challis's immediate neighbours were concerned, about half-way through his cigar, just as regret began to set in that he had smoked so much of it.

Now it happened that Mr. Ramsey Tomes, who was quite unexhausted, though he had talked all day, and who was seated on the other side of the table, had at that moment just sketched the extinction of the British Empire in consequence of its ill-advised persistence in all the *dementiæ* of all the States that *Deus* ever *voluit perdere*. He had used up his Latin quotations, including the one we have taken a liberty with, and had finished with a beautiful picture of the New Zealander, our old friend, gazing across the site of vanished London from Jack Straw's Castle, and murmuring to himself, "Perierunt etiam ruinæ." Happy in his peroration, the orator sat sustaining a fat right foot on a fat left knee with a fat

left hand. His fat right thumb and forefinger held a permanent glass of port; they seemed to be waiting for it to evaporate. His attitude was unfavourable to his figure, as it laid too much stress on a corporate capacity which might have been described as pendant. But the *ensemble* was majestic, as he fixed his small but piercing eye on the cornice of the room opposite, grasping the eyeglass that accompanied it with what almost seemed a materialized allusion to his own powerful grasp of political issues. So sitting, his appearance was that of a Mind, giving attentive consideration to most things.

"The disciple of Socrates," said he, with a decision and suddenness that compelled respectful attention, "turns with satisfaction from the contemplation of a spectacle that might well arrest the orgies of an Epicurus, or soften the cynicism of a Diogenes, to the fields in which Speculation, untrammelled by official responsibility, deposits—if I may be permitted the simile—the eggs from which will emerge (like Minerva from the brain of Jove) the fully-fledged Politician of the future."

Here an expression of discontent from a young Lieutenant, whose chit was in the drawing-room awaiting his release, distracted Challis's attention for the moment. A word of sympathy elicited from this youth that he had a private grievance against Mr. Tomes. "*You* wouldn't like it any more than I do, if he had trod on *your* pup. Poor little beggar's only a month old!" He brooded over this injury in silence, and the orator again became audible. He seemed to have been digressing.

"I will pursue this aspect of the case no further, but will return to the subject in hand. It is not, I hope, necessary for me to say, at this table, that I am not one of that group of indiscriminate Thinkers who are prepared to welcome the germination of the Political Idea in the crude brain of every Sciolist. The outcome of such a surrounding is but too apt to out-Herod Herod. The *medio tutissimus ibis*, the *procellas cautus horrescis* that we may suppose to have guided Cæsar's wife, should also serve as a beacon to those whose ambition it is to deserve the gratitude of posterity." Challis was enjoying the cigar too much to ask—"Why Cæsar's wife?"

Mr. Tomes's assumption of his right to the rostrum was so forcible as scarcely to allow of usurpation while he was visibly bolting an *ad interim* glass of port with a view to going on again. Mr. Brownrigg chafed, and Mr. Wraxall stood himself over in despair. The young Lieutenant murmured a prayer to any Providence that would shape the end of Mr. Tomes's speech, and help

him on to it. There seemed no hope. So he thought of the chit's teeth and chin in self-defence. Mr. Tomes swallowed his glass of port with a clear conscience about its non-evaporation—had he not given it every opportunity?—and resumed:

"I must not, however, allow myself to be led away. . . ." But he had to pause a few seconds, to remember something to have been led away by. Feeling uncertain, he repeated: "I must not allow myself to be led away by a side-topic, however fascinating. The maturity of Political Thought claims our attention. Whether we contemplate the vast areas of controversy laid bare to the scalpel of the Political Analyst in connection with the aspirations of the Socialist pure and simple, the Anarchist pure and simple, or the Nihilist pure and simple, or differentiate by a closer scrutiny the theories of the Socialist-Anarchist, the Socialist-Nihilist, or the Nihilist-Anarchist, we are driven irresistibly to the same conclusion—that Omniscience is still in its infancy. There is one element which all schemes for the Readjustment of the Universe have in common—namely, that each differs on some vital point from the whole of its neighbours. Do not let us be discouraged by this. Let us rather be content to infer from it the dangers that await those who advocate rash departures from the existing order of things, and to recognize, in the discrepancies attendant on the consolidations of Political Opinion in the thousand and one groups into which it crystallizes, the indisputable fact that the Index-finger of the Political Horizon is the maintenance of the *status quo*. I trust I make myself clearly understood."

Mr. Tomes did not mean to stop for some time yet, but breath was necessary to him, as to others, and he had got blown over those groups that crystallized. He knew that his last words would make all his hearers speak at once, and they did. In the Chaos of their joint remark was concealed a statement apiece that Mr. Tomes had most lucidly expounded the one great object of each one's several scheme, and that the existing order of things would remain thereby much more truly the same—would have a much more heart-felt identity than any mere banal and Philistine letting-alone could confer upon it. The choral character of the performance made the warning check of Mr. Tomes's outspread hand plausible.

"Pardon me one moment," said he, with recovered breath. "The point I wish to lay stress upon is this: While the compass of the Political Mariner points incontestably to the dangers of quitting a safe anchorage, the Voice of Enlightenment enjoins that all new schemes of a subversive nature should be looked at on their merits, and rejected on their merits. This is what I understand by an En-

lightened Conservatism. Rejection without examination is the programme of the Mere Bigot. I am sure Sir Murgatroyd will appreciate my meaning."

Sir Murgatroyd, thus appealed to, seized his opportunity, and dexterously annexed the rostrum. He contrived to embark on a trip through the pamphlet he had written, which claimed for William the Conqueror the position of the earliest pioneer of Socialism.

Just as he was within a measurable distance of his demonstration that the Feudal System contained in itself solutions of all difficulties such as the present age meets by propounding a huge variety of remedies and calling them all Socialism, noises of arrival interrupted him, and were followed by an incursion of the motorists, very tired and greedy, after a delay due to civilization, which prescribes soap and water before meals, and a curb on one's impatience till the said meals can be laid on the table. The absence of snorts without occasioned remark, and compelled a grudging disclosure that the last time the motor broke down nothing could bring it to the scratch again; and it had been left behind ten miles off, the party having come home on a mean hired vehicle. Their faith that this breakdown was abnormal and exceptional, and a typical example of the sort of thing that never occurs again, was touching and beautiful.

Mr. Triptolemus Wraxall was glad of the interruption. He had not asserted himself, and felt that he was a mistake, in that society. His forms of thought were more studious and reflective —sounder altogether! One feels this when one has not asserted oneself, and bounced.

Mr. Brownrigg was sorry. He had made up his mind to point out something, but had not quite made up his mind what it was to be; merely that it would redound to the credit of Graubosch. Why should not he point out, and venture to call your attention to, like other people? However, the others were the losers.

Mr. Challis and the young Lieutenant were both very glad, but with a difference. The former thought fit, for some reason, to represent to his conscience that his gladness was due to a release from intolerable boredom, and certainly had nothing to do with any young woman in the drawing-room. The latter made no bones about it, but simply ran, the moment the excuse came. Even so would the little beggar Mr. Tomes trod on have gone for a saucer of milk.

Challis passed the young soldier on the landing, he having found his chit on the bottom stair of the next flight, devoting herself to

the little beggar, who had not been welcomed in the drawing-room, owing to human prejudices. The chit had been so bored in the absence of her counterchit, as the Lieutenant might be called, that she had found it necessary to send for Cerberus. That was the little beggar's baptismal name. Challis passed on into the drawing-room, breathing a prayer that all would be well. What his foreboding was we do not know.

He thought it necessary to deny his own accusation against himself that he had been pleased at the Lieutenant running on in front of him to join the ladies first, that he might thereby seem even-minded on the question of his own anxiety to do so. He denied it, and to satisfy himself of the strength of his position, walked in indifferently. He emphasized his denial by spending no more than a remark or two on Lady Arkroyd, who, he thought, showed a lack of her usual cordiality, as though she had read a disparaging review. He inquired a little whether she found the ride to Thanes pleasant, and so on; and then went at once to the other end of her daughter's sofa—not a very long one. Indeed he could hardly do otherwise, as Judith certainly transferred her fine eyes from him to its vacant corner-cushion. He was a little nettled at finding he wanted an excuse for his alacrity.

We have read in some novel that the reason women are so fond of unprincipled men is that they know the latter can and will enjoy their society thoroughly, and never vex their souls with any questions as to what that society may mean or lead to for either of them. They, the women, will do the drawing the line, and that sort of thing. Why be prigs? Now Challis was scarcely a prig, and he was certainly not an unprincipled man. If he had been the one, he would have thought much more talk necessary with the mother before monopolizing the daughter; if the other, his choice of a satisfaction would have been as candid as his young soldier's had been—as the little beggar's always was. Whether the authoress of this novel was talking wisely or not, who shall say? Broadly speaking, profligates are better company than prigs. *Cæteris paribus,* mind you!

This is all by the way; will very likely be deleted before this present writing goes to press. Miss Arkroyd was certainly not under any necessity to speculate on the matter. *She* knew perfectly well that Mr. Challis, married man or no, was going to anchor at the far end of her sofa as soon as he had got through that silly pretence of chatting with her mother. And she had retired from a colloquy with this same mother—whose influence was not strong over her, and with whom something had disagreed, she thought—

with that end in view. Sibyl wasn't here, with her nonsense, and she should do as she liked. Nay, more!—she would at once say something to show her independence of Sibyl's nonsense.

"We thought you were never coming up." She decided to make it *we*, not *I*, on the whole. Challis's vanity suspected the substitution, recognizing in it a maiden-of-the-world's prudence, and applauded it. But a recollection of what a letter he was going to write to Marianne prompted a protest. He couldn't afford to enjoy his position too much, without loss of self-respect. How important one's self-respect is!

"We were having some very interesting talk about Politics. Your brother and sister and Lord Felixthorpe came back and interrupted it." There was great detachment in this, but it was overdone; too much like "pointing out" to a polypus that his tentacles were slipping.

Ought her response, thought Judith, to show pique at her quarry's independence—at his contentment to be away from her society? Much too soon!—was her verdict, passed, but not formulated. It would be just like a girl in her first season. And she had not known this man much above forty-eight hours. She was not going to behave like that child in the passage, whose pretty sing-song voice chimed with her young soldier's outside when Challis opened the door to come in just now. Judith felt certain what she was saying was "I was so saw-ry for you having to talk Pawlitics when you might have been up here with me and this dahling pup." Her imagination committed itself to the words, musical drawl and all; but negatived this sort of thing in her own case.

"I should like to have been there to hear it," she said. "What were they talking about? The usual thing, I suppose?"

Challis felt she was an honourable polypus, in whose tentacles he could trust himself. "I can't say," said he. "I'm too recent to know what is or isn't usual. You'll hear the supplement immediately. There they are, coming upstairs!"

The lady remained silent, listening handsomely. The thought in Challis's mind—to the effect that she was the antipodes of Marianne, in looks—was so irrelevant and inappropriate that he gave it notice to quit, incontinently. But he could not serve the notice without admitting possession. He could, though, as a *per contra*, do a little mechanical forecasting of his letter to Marianne. Yes—his course was clear; he would tell his wife how absurdly unlike her in all respects this queenly young woman was; might even go the length of wondering how the partner of *her* joys and

sorrows would be able to live with so much dignity always taking place in his neighbourhood. Would that be like reminding Marianne of her homeliness, though? Oh no!—*he* would take care of that. Still, if Marianne had been just one shade less homely, it would have been easier. Never mind!

The voices on the stairs gathered audibility. Oh yes!—there was papa and the Feudal System. Judith could hear that, plain enough. How sick she was of William the Conqueror! And Mr. Tomes, of course, just as usual! But we mustn't speak too loud, or Mrs. Tomes would hear. What a fool that woman was! But Mr. Challis didn't know her. He must do so, in the interests of his next book. All which, in a voice dropped to confidence-point, tended to engage Mr. Challis's cogs—the simile is an engineering one—in Miss Arkroyd's wheel.

What was that Mr. Tomes was saying? Something or other was to be relegated to the Limbo of departed something-elses. If only those young people wouldn't make such a noise with the puppy, we should hear! Why were things always relegated to Limbos, and why was nothing ever sent to Limbos except by relegation? The question was Challis's. But he was talking at random, for reasons. So was Judith, perhaps, when she said absently: "I have noticed that, too." She was listening carefully to hear if her sister and her co-motorists were following. "I suppose they all came in famished," she added.

"Didn't you see them when they came in?"

"I heard them."

"Didn't they sound famished?"

"Not especially. I didn't pay much attention. As long as no bones are broken. . . . They won't be coming up for some time yet." There was in her voice a very clear implication of relief. The inference was that we, in this sofa-haven, should not be disturbed. Its correctness was soon manifest. No two oratorically-disposed gentlemen, well wound up, ever disturb a chat in a corner, further than mere shouting goes. And Sir Murgatroyd and the sitting member for Grime were wound up to a high pitch of agreement about what constituted an Enlightened Conservatism, and each was anxious to supply the next link in the chain of Syllogism, and get the credit of it. So they shouted against each other all the way upstairs, and only lulled very slightly when they reached the drawing-room.

Mr. Brownrigg and Mr. Wraxall, on the other hand, were *aux grands éprises* on a vital question—never mind what; nobody knew or cared!—which underlay the whole of their argument. Mr.

Wraxall had been unable to permit an inference of Mr. Brownrigg's to pass unchallenged, and Mr. Brownrigg had impugned the data on which Mr. Wraxall's objections were founded. Mr. Wraxall had replied that something or other had been clearly laid down as a safe principle by Baker, and Mr. Brownrigg had pointed out that the fallacy of Baker's assumptions had been exhaustively dealt with by Smith. Mr. Wraxall had counter-pointed out that Smith's penetrating insight into everything else had led him into error in this one particular; and had laid stress upon the fact that Hopkins, the weight of whose opinion it was impossible to deny, had endorsed the opinions of Baker. Mr. Brownrigg had then become patronizing, and went so far as to warn Mr. Wraxall not to be led away by the plausibility of Hopkins. Who then, being a weak controversialist, had rashly appealed to Mr. Ramsey Tomes to countenance the authority of Hopkins. But that gentleman only gave a weighty shake to a judicial head, claiming at once profound thought in the past, and forecasting just censure to come. He feared that the insidious ratiocinations of Hopkins were a rock we all split upon in the forest of youth, and an *ignis fatuus* to mislead the mariner in the ocean of dialectical difficulty that chequered our steps in later life.

The controversy, of which the foregoing is a condensation, had passed the quarrelsome point when the disputants arrived in the drawing-room, shutting out the melodious trill of the chit, the squeaks of the little beggar, and the lieutenant's bass voice, saying, "He and the kitten were having a high old time with my boots early this morning." The argument was in the mutual-amends stage, and Mr. Brownrigg was enlarging on the enthralling and irresistible fascination of Hopkins's style, while Mr. Wraxall was equally eloquent on the almost Nicholsonian vigour and expansiveness of Smith's. They were then separated, and presently the insurer was audible afar, enlarging to Lady Arkroyd on a scheme for insuring against damage at the Wash, in which she was much interested; while the Grauboschite was mentioning some further details of that great man's system to Mrs. Ramsey Tomes. Who, however, only said: "I think my husband would like to hear that," or "Have you mentioned that to Mr. Tomes?" but gave no sign of receiving, or of ever having in her life received, an idea on her own account. The Baronet and the M.P. simply went on, like the water coming in when the ball-cock has stuck, and nobody will be at work till Monday.

All this is only to impress on the story the quiet of that sofa-haven, and to justify Judith for feeling practically out of reach of

interruption if she should be inclined to carry on the skein-twisting a little prematurely—that is, without waiting for a visiting acquaintance with the probably plebeian wife, to put her friendship with the husband on an ascertained footing. Now Judith was not without a well-defined motive for the skein-twisting, as was hinted at the end of our last chapter. We rather think that if she had not been she would have suspected something abnormal in Challis's matrimonies from his manner when he said "Craik." Women are as sharp as all that—oh dear, yes!

After a little discursive chat to make sure that no floating interruption would desert the other group-units and bear down on their haven, Judith was seized with a sudden intense apprehension that Mr. Challis could write a tragedy. She can have had very slight grounds for this conclusion; she had almost no knowledge of that author's work, as we have seen. But she relied on his vanity to make him take an easy-going view of any claims she had to pronounce him Shakespeare. Pleasing verdicts soothe the cavils of incredulous modesty, and suggest unsuspected data in the bush. But he was bound to make some sort of protest. It would never do to say he rather thought he could.

"What makes you think that?" he said.

"I can't say. It has nothing to do with anything I have read of yours. I think it is something in yourself makes me think so." It was as well to head off any discussion of what she had read; and an ounce of personality is worth a ton of mere evasion. The fine eyes examined Mr. Challis's intelligent brow carefully to see what it was in himself that made their owner think so. His own watched them as though expecting their conclusion would be registered shortly.

"I have written a couple of comedies," said he, to help. "But no tragedy, so far." And from thence a certain reality crept into the conversation, which up to that moment had been rather words for words' sake, or, perhaps it should be said, for their speaker's sake. For so much talk that sets up to be interchange of ideas is uttered to convince the speakers they are conversing, and to make them plausible to themselves and each other.

"You *have* written for the stage, then. That is what I meant. Have you had anything performed yet? Forgive my not knowing."

"There is nothing to know that you could have known. One of the comedies, 'Aminta Torrington,' is to come out after Christmas. The other, 'Widow's Island,' is on the shelf. Nobody appreciates it."

"Do you see a great deal of theatrical people?" Now, Challis had wanted the eyes to be interested about his plays—to abet the speaker in a curiosity she ought to have felt. But no matter: that would wait.

"I see a great many. What makes you ask in such an interested way?"

"Because I want to know. I have a reason. I'll tell you sometime." Whereat the mercury in the thermometer of this lady and gentleman's intimacy went up a degree distinctly. So much was implied in the word "sometime." Not very easy to summarize, certainly—but *there,* all the same! It ratified anticipation of future intercommunications, on the surface of it. Also, it hinted at confidences to come. But let us be just to Judith here. She never meant it as another wind of the skein. She was honestly unconscious this time, thinking frankly of an interest of her own. She continued: "Tell me a good deal about them. Why doesn't one know more of them?"

"I didn't know one didn't. That's nonsense, or sounds very like it. But we know what we mean. I'll state it clearly, to save trouble. The question is, 'Why do swell young women that are presented at Court, and go to balls in the season, and sit in carriages at Ascot, and see polo-matches at Hurlingham, and get married at St. George's, Hanover Square' . . . is that right so far? . . ."

"That will do very well, at any rate." Judith said this without a laugh, where there might have been one. "Go on, Mr. Challis."

"Why does this sort of young woman not meet more actresses and actors in the society she lives in? Well, I can tell you the answer—at least, I can tell you my opinion, if you ask it."

"Yes, I do. What is it?"

"They are always at the play, the actors and actresses, either on the stage or in the boxes. Or the pit. Or the gallery. I can't answer for the whole profession. But that's my experience."

"I have always been told they were so disreputable. Are they?"

"My dear Miss Arkroyd, what a very old-fashioned idea!" Challis laughed outright. "No!—they are just like everybody else as to manners and morals, and that sort of thing. They are not monks and nuns, certainly. But such a many folk are not that."

Judith looked at him doubtfully. Was not that rather the way men sometimes talk, throwing dust in the eyes that want to distinguish right from wrong? Monks and nuns, as we all know, are people that want to deprive you and me of cakes and ale. But what is meant by cakes and ale? She would push a test question

home. If Mr. Challis had a grown-up daughter, she asked, would he let her go on the stage, if she wished it very much, and had a turn for it? Of course he would, was his answer, without hesitation. Why should he not? This seemed to decide Judith on an extension of confidence.

"I will tell you why I am asking. I know a girl . . . well! I should say *woman* . . . who wants to go on the stage. But it seems impossible. What her capabilities would be I cannot say. But it seems hard that she should be unable to give them a trial."

"Why cannot she?"

"Her family oppose it; or rather, she knows they would oppose it if the proposal took form. At present she only knows that they treat the idea with derision—as something hardly worth ridicule."

"But why?—if she has it at heart."

"Respectability. Position. Balls in the season. Carriages at Ascot. St. George's, Hanover Square. Family, in short!"

"Tell me more about this friend. *Why* does she suppose she has qualifications? She must have had *some* experience to convince her?"

Judith stopped to consider a few seconds. "Yes, I can tell you that," she said. "She played in the 'Antigone' a couple of years ago. You know my brother and his friends played it in London, and got the female parts played by women. Of course, at Cambridge it was the boys themselves."

"Did you think her performance good?"

Judith sticks a little over her answer, but it comes. "Not perfectly satisfactory—not to me, at least. But everyone else spoke so well of it that I may have been mistaken."

"Yet you would encourage her to make a very hazardous experiment, and to incur the displeasure of her family, on the strength of no more than what you now tell me. Do allow me to say that your friend ought to have more experience . . ."

"She ought to keep out of the water till she can swim," Judith struck in. "I know the sort of thing. What people always say! But can you wonder that she thinks it hard that she isn't allowed to go in at the shallow end of a swimming-bath; and all because of the merest Mrs. Grundy?"

"Not quite the merest Mrs. Grundy. Moderately mere, suppose we say! The actress who fails is in a sorry plight . . ."

"She *wouldn't* fail." Judith interrupted again, a little impatiently. "At least—I mean—she wouldn't fail altogether. But, of course, she would take her chance of that. Why should she not try, if she chooses to run the risk?"

Challis was watching her image in a mirror as she said this, and thought he saw a blush-rose tinge creeping over the cheek. Surely she was taking this friend's case very much to heart. An idea crossed his mind, and he schemed a test of its truth—a question he would ask.

"Is she beautiful? That would help matters."

The eyes in the mirror turned, and Challis had to withdraw his own suddenly. You know how one feels *caught,* when a reflection in a glass suddenly transfixes one? It is like conviction of treachery—quite unlike the direct transaction analogous to it. But he need not have been so conscious; as he saw, when a furtive glance back showed him that the reflection was not looking at *him,* but at Miss Arkroyd, at her corner of the sofa.

"Beauty is so much a matter of opinion," said she. "No doubt she herself is convinced her allowance of it is enough for working purposes." She stopped a moment, listening to sounds approaching—the motor-party audible on the stairs. Then, as she began to get up from the sofa, she said quickly, "If you think you can be of any use to her—with introductions and so on—I will tell you who she is. Sometime; not now. There they are!" The interview was at an end, and Challis prepared to merge in a world he was sure would be less interesting. However, he felt some curiosity to hear the tale of the motor disaster.

CHAPTER VIII

OF HOW NO ACCIDENT HAD REALLY HAPPENED TO THE MOTOR-CAR. OF A COMBAT BETWEEN TWO SISTERS, CHIEFLY ABOUT THOSE OF PEOPLE'S DECEASED WIVES. OF FLIRTATIONS WITH MARRIED MEN. HOW CHALLIS WROTE A LONG AMUSING LETTER TO MARIANNE

THE chit and her young officer felt unequal to remaining outside, against the tidal wave of the returned motorists. Occasional suspension is necessary to the greediest flirtation, to give it a flavour of stolenness; else it loses its character, and palls. This is our surmise as to why these young people allowed themselves to be swept into the drawing-room by the current. Cerberus seemed to have been withdrawn. It is not necessary to the story to know whether the little beggar had or had not disappointed his backers. No questions were asked.

The way in which the motor-party ignored their accident was more like the concerted vigour of artillerymen in charge of a gun than any mere philosophical submission to the will of Fate. Practically the machine's twenty-horse-power had brought them in triumph to the door exactly at the time appointed. A trivial excursion into non-fulfilment of its destiny was not the poor motor's fault, nor its inventor's, nor its maker's, nor its *chauffeur's*. It was all due to a little bit of original sin in the heart of a hexagon nut, which, having heard that the only key that it could be got at with was mislaid, immediately went slack. It resisted the importunities of a screw-hammer, and demanded a box-key. Like some minute organism of humanity—a spiteful *medulla oblongata*, say!—endowed with powers of striking work, it had paralyzed the whole structure. But, unlike the *medulla oblongata*, it could be set right in five minutes as soon as we had a proper box-key. Therefore it was as clear as noonday that the mishap as an incident in the History of Motoring hadn't happened at all. It was by-play—didn't count!

The expedition had been a great success. Its object had been attained; like that of the scout who locates the enemy, but leaves his horse behind. When you have seen premises that are the very thing, what does it matter how you get home? For the purposes of the Great Idea, these premises were the very thing.

Three large waterwheels, one overshot, ninety-four-horse-power in all, and the most glorious oak- and beechwoods coming down to the waterside. And the most interesting fourteenth-century pound William Rufus had ever seen. He and his friend Scipio were fascinated with the place, and enthusiastic about the Great Idea. But while apt to feel pique at any doubt thrown on the wisdom of the scheme, the latter was not prepared to forego the luxury of making fun of it himself.

"No historical associations," said he, with perfect deliberation of manner, "could supply a more healthy stimulus to the production of what I believe are called Art Objects. The church, a most interesting example of several styles, has been judiciously restored in one—I forget which—and the castle, some portions of which are previous to something very early—I forget what——"

"Suppose you shut up, Scip," said his friend. "You're never in earnest about anything. No—it really is the most delightful place I've ever seen. You wouldn't look so scornful if you could see it, Ju. And as for its suitability, I don't see how there can be any question about that."

His sister Sibyl's practical mind—her manner laid claim to one—went straight on to details. "The only thing," she said, "that I didn't see a place for was the ivorycarver' shop."

"Couldn't one of those places in the roof be converted?" her brother asked.

"Too hot in the summer," said Sibyl decisively. "I can see the weaving-sheds, and the jewellery-shops, and the bookbinder's department, and the printing-house, and the woodblock-cutter's little shop round by the stairs, and the ceramic works—(only we really must be sure that chimney-shaft will be any good)—and the bronze-casters, and the printed fabrics, and the type-writing *de luxe* for private circulation." She checked off each department on her fingers, imagining clearly—so Mr. Challis, who was watching her, thought—the place in which it was to be located. Then she came to her exception—"But where on earth these tiresome ivory-carvers are to be put I can't imagine!"

Her brother, with perfect gravity, accepted the difficulty as one to be wrestled with. "I don't see why they need be downstairs at all," said he. "Why not put them in—well!—if not in the roof, why not in that room beyond the Art-needlework schools?"

"We can't conveniently have boys and young men passing and repassing." Sibyl was giving it serious thought; no doubt of that! She added with conviction: "We shall have to build in the end; so we may as well look the matter in the face."

"What do you want with ivorycarvers?" Thus Judith, with a near approach to a yawn. It never came off, owing to good breeding; but Mr. Challis noted to himself that it would have been statuesque had it done so. Marianne's yawn was not statuesque. He could recall cases in point. . . . What had that to do with the matter, by-the-bye? Challis brushed it away by joining in a murmur of half-protest against Judith's question. The world was listening interested to the evolution of the Great Idea. Politics had slacked down—to give it a turn. And the world perceived, in a doubt thrown on the necessity for ivory carving, a dangerous phase of criticism that might undermine the whole scheme.

Sibyl said, with decisive resignation, "Oh dear!—how exactly like you that is, Ju!" And her brother, "That's Judith all over." Then both asked a mixed question, equivalent to—If not ivory carvers, why not not anything? Why not no jewelery?—no art needlework?—no hammered metal or wood carving? The world's murmur of half-protest—so Challis thought—had really less to do with the demerits of the cavil it condemned than with the obviousness of the answer to it. A mob is apt to mistake its self-gratulation at having perceived something for agreement with the thing it has perceived. Folk sing below par in unison, and no one cares much which way he votes in a *plebiscite*. This is what Mr. Challis thought, not a remark of the text. He resolved to put it in his next book.

"I am in a minority." Judith dropped her fine eyelids with a hint in the action of formal surrender, as one strikes a banner. "Even Mr. Challis has deserted me!" Challis said, "Not altogether. I'm a trimmer playing fast and loose. A sort of plaid, like Sam Weller." But he had not understood his *monde*. It was one that knew nothing about Sam Weller.

The rest of the company—all but the chit and counterchit—showed a disposition to talk to each other of conditions necessary to be observed in the sudden inauguration of complex undertakings, these conditions touching points familiar to the speaker, but not within the experience of others. Each would call Mr. Arkroyd's attention to a danger ahead, or an advantage to be attained by well-advised foresight, as early as possible to-morrow, so that Opportunity might be taken by the forelock.

Mr. Ramsey Tomes enjoined caution before all things. He spoke as one having a monopoly of prudent instincts, to the exclusion of a rash planetful of fellow-creatures, or as the voice of one crying "Beware!" in the wilderness of pitfalls Don't-care

neglected, with such fatal consequences. He suggested, like the father of him who slew the Jabberwock, that he who only took sufficient heed was certain of success—need not make any positive efforts—could go on rather better without them. One would have thought he meant—Mr. Challis *did* think—that any commentator so cautious as never to open a volume was well half-way to a triumph of exegesis, and that Columbus would have discovered America all the quicker if he had stopped at home. The story, Mr. Tomes concluded, of the failure of the plethora of rash enterprises that were our inheritance from an otherwise glorious Past would fill a volume. Mr. Challis thought to himself that this was unworthy of its author—rather an anticlimax. But Mr. Tomes was sleepy.

In fact, it was getting late, and a sense of impending adjournment was vitiating the discussion: a little pitted speck in the garnered fruits of its intelligence was growing, and a period of sleepy incapacity was in sight. Winding-up remarks became frequent, such as "We shall have to think all that over," or "We must settle this, that, and the other first, before anything practical can be done," or "One thing's certain, at any rate"—this last being the prelude to several different conclusions. In the end the view that we might sleep upon it was welcomed as an epigrammatic truth, and acted on. The company broke up, finding their bedroom-candles in the passage.

And as the chit and the counterchit tore themselves apart till morning, the latter said to the former, "What was all the fun? Did you make out?" To which the chit replied simply, "I wawesn't listening," in a long sweet drawl. And to that young officer's ears—will you believe it?—these words seemed the embodiment of divine wisdom, and he remained intoxicated!

Miss Sibyl Arkroyd, although she had just professed herself utterly worn out with her hard afternoon's work, was not too tired to say to her sister, over the lighting of a bedroom-candle in the passage, "Come into my room; I've something to say to you."

Judith, majestically undisturbed at anything a younger sister can possibly have to say, is in no hurry to comply with this request or mandate. Rather, she is inclined to make a parade of deliberation, exchanging understandings with Mr. Challis over the heads of the group of males with whom he is retiring to the smoking-room, to end the day with a cigar. Secret reciprocities seem to have set in, thinks Sibyl, pausing on the landing above, out of sight. And these are too subtle for the vernacular guests, and

outclass the counterchits altogether. Though, as each of these last is dwelling contentedly on his recent chit, that doesn't come into court.

But Sibyl is wary, and gets away in time to her room. She just hears her sister's farewell speech to the author: "Do consider your readers a little, Mr. Challis, and don't ruin your brain with too many cigars," and his answer: "It all depends on the quality of the baccy;" followed by a testimonial from William Rufus about the brand of the one Challis has just chosen; and then she ends a majestic ascent of the broad stairway, with the portraits of departed Arkroyds looking down from its wainscoted walls, by disappearing into her sister's room.

"What's the something, Sibyl?"

"You'll be angry if I tell you."

"I may." Judith keeps her candle in her hand. Is it worth putting it down, if dissension in the wind is pointing to a short interview? "But how can I tell till I know? Why did you want me?"

"Well—I'll tell you. But you mustn't fly into a rage. That man Mr. Scoop—or Harris, or whatever his name is—married his Deceased Wife's Sister!"

"Is that any concern of mine?"

"You wouldn't speak in that way if it weren't."

"In what way?"

"The way you spoke." What may seem inexplicable here is due to the inability of mere words to do justice to the intensity of Judith's unconcern. There was no need for an indifference such as a humming-top asleep shows to the history of its own time.

"I don't mind waiting till you are reasonable, Sib dear." This little bit of Prussian tactics improved Judith's position. She put her candlestick on a piece of real Chippendale, to express anchorage, but remained standing. She had been looking very handsome in the white chiffon all the evening, and thought so. Her subconscious judgment confirmed this, as a mirror on a wardrobe door swung her reflection before her for a moment. Sibyl had opened it. Judith looked at her wrist-watch as she stood, but meant, subconsciously, to look up again when the counterswing brought the image back. All which occurred, and then Sibyl sat against the bed-end, having disposed of the wardrobe, and said:

"You know you have been in Mr. Harris's company all day, Judith. And I suppose it's going to be the usual thing. But there's no sense in your calling me unreasonable simply because I want you to know what the position is."

"What *is* the position?"

"Just what I've told you. Mr. Harris . . . well—Challis then . . . is not really a married man. He married—at least, made believe to marry—his Deceased Wife's Sister."

"Then, now you've told me what the position is, I know. And I may go to bed."

"Don't be irritating, Judith." It *is* provoking, you know, when your enemy makes a successful rally after a seeming repulse. Judith's last tactical move was masterly. Her success soothed her to moderation.

"I don't want to be irritating, Sib. And I don't think you have any right to talk of being irritating after what you said just now. '*The* usual thing!' What usual thing?"

"You know what I mean, and it doesn't matter."

"I don't think it matters the least. But what do you know about Mr. Challis? I mean, what do you know that I don't?"

"Only what I told you."

"But how do you know? Really, Sibyl, I shall go if there are to be any more mysteries."

"Well, don't be impatient, and I'll tell you." And thereon Sibyl, seated on the end of the bed, gave the substance of a short chat with her mother when she came in from the excursion. That lady must have been mighty interested, Judith thought, to talk about Mr. Challis's affairs, which could not possibly concern any of them. She said as much, resentfully, to her sister.

"Well," said Sibyl, "I only tell you what she said to me. She drove Mrs. Barham home from Thanes, and they talked about it all the way. The Bishop had it on perfectly good authority. I think it was the editor of some well-known paper who had heard it from a gentleman who had interviewed Mr. Challis for him. You know how they do?" Oh yes!—Judith knew. "Well, this gentleman had it from Mr. Challis himself, who had begged him very earnestly to say nothing about it. So, of course, nothing appeared in the article."

"What a delicate-minded editor!"

"I think it was very nice of him. Why not? But you always sneer, Ju. Anyhow, that's what the *madre* said to me. And we agreed that the sooner you knew the better. . . ."

"And why?"

"Oh, well, because, of course. . . . However, we can't discuss that now at this time of night. I only know what Mrs. Barham said the Bishop said. . . ."

"What did His Holiness say?"

"Judith, if you sneer I won't talk to you. . . . Well, the Bishop said that if he had his way, he would refuse Holy Communion to all people's Deceased Wife's Sisters . . . there!—you know what I mean perfectly well, Judith."

Judith had started a protest, but gave up the point. "I know what you mean. But why doesn't he?"

"Mrs. Barham said he did not feel sure of the support of Public Opinion. But for all that this gentleman was living in Sin, technically if not actually, or actually as well as technically, or . . . well!—I forget which . . . with this woman." Sibyl paused; the pause was a tribute to the force of the curl of her sister's lip. She ended: "Come, Ju, you can't call her a *lady*, you know!"

"Did the Bishop say gentleman?"

"No. By-the-bye, I think the Bishop *did* say man. But, of course, he would speak scripturally. Besides, all gentlemen are men too, but all women are not ladies."

The curl died very slowly on Judith's lip, if at all. "Poor Mr. Challis!" said she. "He doesn't know what he's losing—at least, what he *would* lose if it wasn't for Bishop Barham's respect for the World. Fancy having the Holy Communion refused one—by Bishop Barham! . . ."

"Judith! If you're going to blaspheme! . . ."

"I'm not, dear. I'm going to say good-night. And to-morrow I'll tell Mr. Challis of his parlous plight."

"Oh, Ju, you never will!"

"Wait and see! Good-night, dear." The "dear" was rather perfunctory. And it was not to correct it to tenderness that Judith turned back in the doorway and reclosed it from within. "I want to know what you meant by 'the usual thing,'" she said, and waited.

"I thought you said you didn't think it mattered."

"I don't think it does. But I want to know what you meant by it, just the same."

The return into the room to ask the question added to its weight somehow. Sibyl might have answered more forcibly and less pertly had it been asked during conversation. "I should have thought, after the Honourable Stephen, that that went without saying."

"'After the Honourable Stephen'! . . . Sibyl!" There is growing resentment in the handsome woman's voice of protest, and a slight flinching in her sister's manner recognizes it. She speaks uncomfortably.

"Well, what would you have me say? You know quite well, Ju, that the *madre* thinks so too. What is the use of pretending?"

Judith's colour is heightened as she closes the door to prevent someone hearing in the passage—her maid perhaps or her sister's. "*I* see no use in pretending, Sib. If you and mamma are going to say spiteful and malicious things, you had better speak them out. . . . Yes, it *is* spiteful and malicious to try to make out that there was anything between me and Stephen Lyell; it is simply wicked to use the word flirtation. . . . No—I know you have not actually used it—but it's the same thing. It was that woman entirely! And you know it!"

"I should have felt as she did. Besides, Lady Di Lyell's no fool. Look how you had him to yourself all day long . . . oh yes! —I know what you are going to say. Perhaps there wasn't. But some people can get on perfectly well without *any* love-making. I think that way's the worst; it's insidious and hypocritical. Yes, Judith!—if you *are* going to flirt with a married man, I would sooner you did it above-board." Notice Sibyl's elisions, and how easily understood they seemed to be. Sisters' intercourse is based on concurrent consciousness of the actual; sometimes admitted, sometimes concealed. These two had harboured theirs from the nursery, usually finding speech for them. In the present case they had never spoken quite openly, though each knew the other knew of her knowledge, and pointed allusions to flirtations with married men had been perfectly well understood.

Judith has been keeping back a great deal of anger—she has self-control in plenty—to affect a certain patronage of a younger sister; albeit she has only a couple of years more to her half of the fifty they share between them. "Sib dear!" she says. "You are entirely absurd—quite childish. If her jealous ladyship wasn't secure against me and poor good, honourable Stephen, where is married bliss to find security? Unless men and women are never to be friends at all."

"Nobody objects to it that I know of. Only not one at a time. You know the difference that makes as well as I do—as well as everyone does."

Probably Judith did, and that was why she said nothing—or, at least, in what she did say made no reply to the last assertion, but went back to the general question. She put her hand on the door-handle to suggest peroration and spoke collectedly and coldly.

"You are quite wrong, Sibyl, when you use the word 'flirtation' about me and Stephen Lyell. Cordial acquaintance is quite enough—even friendship is a little overstrained. Not but that we

are very good friends, and should always keep so, only for that fool of a woman! But I shall always think somebody made mischief." She turned the door-handle to indicate the penultimate character of what was coming, but did not open the door. "And as for this Mr. Alfred Challis or 'Titus Scroop'—who is a person, by-the-bye, with whom any sort of flirtation would be *simply impossible*—he's just a clever playwriter without the slightest pretence to be considered a . . . no!—I wasn't going to say gentleman; let me finish . . . accustomed to the ways of Society." Sibyl didn't feel convinced, but kept her counsel. "And I have my own reasons for wishing to cultivate his acquaintance."

Now, surely, at this late hour of the night, and after so active a day, and with these two young ladies' respective maids wondering *sotto voce* on the landing outside what on earth it's all about—surely that door-handle might have turned in earnest! But we all know the fire that seems put out with a spark still chuckling in its core at the nice blaze it means to be one day. Perhaps if Sibyl had said "I ss—see" with less of suggestion that some human frailty undefined had been sighted by her shrewdness, and had commanded her sympathy; and perhaps (even more) if she had abstained from saying to herself, "I thought it was that," in a voice that was evidently intended to be heard, yet to seem inaudible—perhaps the fire would not have broken out again. As it was, the door-handle had a relapse, and its manipulator said rather sharply: "Thought it was what?"

"The Stage," was the reply. "Oh yes, Ju!—I know all about it; so you needn't look like a Tragedy Queen. Pray disgrace your family! Good-night, dear."

"Sibyl, you are a thoroughly selfish woman . . . did you say *why*? Why—because you are indulging all your own fancies—just flinging away hundreds on all sorts of useless fads, and all the while opposing me in a reasonable wish—for it *is* reasonable to wish to give it a trial—because of a miserable, old-fashioned prejudice against a profession which at least is as respectable as hammering little copper pots and making little bits of fussy enamelled jewellery. I can't tell you how *sick* I get of hearing of it all. . . ." Anger at mere impertinence does not involve a flush, like resentment against a charge of misdemeanour on a point of delicacy. But one can go white with anger, and Judith's change of colour may be due to it, as she says what she evidently means to be her last word. Sibyl tries to deprive it of a last word's advantage.

"If you are going to take that tone, Ju," she replies, "I think

we had better talk no more about it. And how little copper pots can have anything fast or disreputable about them I don't know. But pray disgrace your family, if you can get anyone to help you—Mr. Scoop, or Challis, or anyone." Then this young lady did not play fair, for she said or as good as said that if her sister was as tired and sleepy as she herself was, she wouldn't stand there talking, but would go to bed. But even this was not so bad as adding: "And what all this has to do with Mr. Scoop's Deceased Wife's Sister I can't imagine!" The dry tone in which Judith said, "Nor I, dear!" may have conveyed her views about her sister's powers of Logic, without more enlargement—at least, she indulged in none and went away to her own bedroom rather despising herself for feeling exasperated, but knowing that she was so by the satisfaction she got from an increased indifference to what her family thought about the theatrical profession. Her stage-mania was getting the bit in its teeth. But she could find it in her heart to laugh at Sibyl for trying to support her own fads on the moral repute of little copper pots. Why, so far as that went, the little pots might be anchorites in deserts for any power they had of blemishing it.

As for "Mr. Scroop's Deceased Wife's Sister," *that*, she knew, was nonsense, because he had told her the name of his first wife. Or, stop a minute!—might she not have been a half-sister? Judith guessed shrewdly. But then—it occurred to her presently—would that count? She thought of this after she was in bed, and was half inclined to get up, and look up the point in her prayer-book.

The suspicion that had crossed Challis's mind in the drawing-room was confirmed by the way his companion had glanced at herself in the mirror, before answering his question about the beauty of her friend the stage-aspirant, more than by the wording of her answer. After all, the fact that a good-looking woman had refused an unqualified testimonial to the beauty of an alleged friend was very negative evidence indeed that she was all the while speaking of herself. But the glance at her reflection seemed natural enough to him under the circumstances, though he was ready to admit that, much as he had written about them, he did *not* understand women. His conclusion from it was supported by something not altogether natural in the tone of the answer; the substance of it might be no more than provisional modesty, to cover future confession. Had she answered that her friend had a Juno-like figure, a splendid Greek brow and nose, rich coils of dark hair, a stately column of a throat, and ample justification for evening dress whenever war-

ranted by authority—could she have looked him in the face later and claimed the identity? Challis dwelt upon the inventory more than was needed, and decided that the semi-evasion had been skilful, and had shown that its author was superior to frivolous vanities. There was glamour about this: men persist in ascribing high qualities to beautiful women, and only concede them grudgingly to dowdies as a set-off to their unhappy plainness.

Anyhow, even if he was mistaken, his mistake would give him a sound ground for writing as much as he was inclined to write about this young lady to Marianne; and he felt, without exactly knowing why, inclined to write rather liberally about her. Perhaps, if he had had a mind for self-vivisection, he would have found that he shrank from acknowledging the reason he had hitherto flinched from writing about her to his wife; which was, briefly, that he was just too far *entiché* to feel at ease in telling her how much in love he had fallen with one of the daughters, and how awfully jolly she was, and how awfully jealous she, Marianne, would be if she was there to see. *You* know—male reader over head and ears in wedlock!—that that is what *you* would have written, and despatched with an authenticating photograph if one was attainable. And you would have asked for the last photo of your correspondent in return—the one with baby pulling her hair; not that beastly one yearning, with the lips slightly parted—to give as a swop to your new love; because six copies were to come from Elliott and Fry's, and we could have as many more as we wanted. But Mr. Alfred Challis was not so detached as all this; and, without absolutely suspecting it, he was not sorry to be supplied with a well-defined *locus scribendi*, where all analysis and justification would merge and be forgotten. He felt, with such a licence of free pen, much more ready to go to work with his long letter to Marianne about that long walk to the Rectory to-day. See what a lot he could find to tell about that Parson who wanted (or didn't) to marry his Deceased Wife's Sister! Partly on the question itself—one, of course, of the greatest interest to both—and partly, if not more, because he had just remembered that surely the name of the Parson who took on the duties for Charlotte Eldridge's reverend cousin out Clapham way was Athelstan Something; and hadn't he, the said cousin, been known to come away to this part of the world to take his friend's duties in the country and get change of air? Of course! And then, too, there was the incident of the sofa in the evening. Yes!—he would make the peep into the mirror amusing.

They were new candles all through again this evening—really!

. . . the extravagance in these great houses! What would Marianne say if she saw it? But so much the better! Candles that have never been blown out give a much better light than restarted ones—who can say why? Challis settled down soon to his long letter, and wrote well into the night. The four candles he had enlisted had burned down to mere housekeeper's perquisites—substitute-justifiers—by the time he had signed himself Marianne's loving Tite; and after a good stretch in acknowledgment of an hour's bent back, had lighted an isolated sample with an extinguisher-parasite, so as to blow all four out together, and keep them neck and neck.

After he was in bed he said to himself that he must make sure that letter went by the first post, or it would only reach Marianne such a short time before the writer. It was very stupid of him, that it was, to have allowed so many days to pass before writing a proper account of "these people" to his wife. She had only had such very perfunctory letters before. He classed it as a stupidity. However, it might end by his overstaying the week he was asked for by more than an extra day already bespoken, and then this long letter would seem in better keeping. That would make it all right.

CHAPTER IX

HOW MARIANNE SHOWED THAT LETTER TO AN INTIMATE FRIEND, MRS. ELDRIDGE. WHERE WAS THAT SOFA? OF COUNTRY AND TOWN HOUSES. JEALOUSY

MARIANNE CHALLIS had never become quite reconciled to her new life at the Hermitage at Wimbledon, obvious as was the improvement on her old home in Great Coram Street. What she would have liked would have been that Titus—for she had adopted the Christian name of his *nom de plume,* not without pride—should become a brilliant and successful author, that a plentiful income should take the place of the modest salary of a subordinate—important, but still a subordinate—in a City accountant's; but that, nevertheless, their old life should go on as it had done since their marriage nine years ago.

She made little concessions and reservations. They would have had a bath put up in the little room next the nursery, on the second floor, with a regular hot-water service from the kitchen. The old kitchen-range might have been got rid of at the same time, and a new one put in its place, with a proper oven, and then it wouldn't have been one long grumble-grumble-grumble from Elizabeth Barclay all day long. They could have had the roof seen to, and the window-frames seen to, and the drains seen to, and all the substantial repairs attended to; and they could have made the landlord do it as soon as they were in a position to threaten him with legal proceedings if he didn't. But really, when you have no means but a limited salary, and a boy's schooling to pay for!—— so Mrs. Challis said to Mrs. Eldridge, a friend in her confidence, and as *she* didn't finish the sentence, we need not. And then the drawing-room could have been made quite pretty, with the same patterned paper, of course, and as near as we could get the carpet. Only it was second-hand when poor Kate bought it fourteen years ago, and the man from Shoolbred's said the pattern was out of date. And as for the beds and the blinds and curtains, it would have been just as easy to have them all new at Coram Street as at Wimbledon. And really Titus could have done perfectly well with the top back attic, out of the noise, to do his writing in. It could

have been made quite nice, and would have looked ever so much bigger with bookcases round.

However, it couldn't be helped now. Titus had condemned the top back attic, and made a fuss about the walls sloping in. Of course, she only meant bookcases on the straight-up walls. But men were like that, and you might talk to them till Doomsday. Mrs. Challis left something defective here also, and we are again under no obligation to complete the sentence for her.

Of course Titus had a much nicer room now—at least, a much larger one. What he wanted such a big room for Marianne couldn't imagine. Just look at the way he wrote that first book, "The Spendthrift's Legacy." In pocket-books and on omnibuses! Just everywhere! However, it pleased him, and when he was pleased he was satisfied. As long as he didn't complain! And yet once more Mrs. Eldridge had to nod an implied easy interpretation with closed lips. She—a wife herself—could understand.

Very likely the might-have-been, in Marianne Challis's mind, of a glorified Great Coram Street, with the successful author turning out immortal works in a glorified top back attic, was only an allotropic form of a condemnation of things that had come to pass at the new home at Wimbledon. Very likely, too, it was unconscious on her part. She may never have noticed that the imaginary new chapters of the closed volume of the old home contained no reference to the new friends her husband's great success had brought about him, to the new Club he belonged to, and met celebrities at, to the dinner invitations that frankly left her out, and —almost more irritating—those that followed a perfunctory card-shedding visit that shouted aloud, "Because we can't ask him and leave *you* out, good author's wife!" The imaginary visitors her fancy saw in the renovated might-have-been drawing-room were John and Charlotte Eldridge, and the Smithsons and Miss Macculloch—not grandma; for Marianne's desire for her mother's presence did not go to the length of cancelling her bronchitis in order to bring her out on imaginary Saturday evenings. And those visionary social gatherings never held a dream of young authoresses, with a strange power of appealing to our hidden sympathies, and dresses that must have cost God knows what. But she never noticed the omission. Nor that of the theatrical people, nor the press people; nor the swells—male and female—who came to sit at the feet of Genius, and be civil to its wife, who, though she may have been slow about *some* things, could see through all *that*, and really never went out, thank you!

But a few days' change was just what her husband wanted. That was what she had said to Lady Arkroyd of Royd Hall, in Rankshire, a case in point, whom her husband had met at Sir Spender's, as he called him, and had encouraged to call on Mrs. Challis at Wimbledon. Now, at Great Coram Street, or the glorified fetch of it, no such person appeared; though, indeed, a few inexplicable fetches were supplied by fancy of people who were in earnest when they wanted her to come too. Neither Lady Arkroyd nor Lady Betty Inglis, who accompanied her, had gone beyond civility point—only men never saw anything, you knew they didn't!

Charlotte Eldridge (in this case) knew perfectly, dear!—and backed up Marianne in refusing to go to Royd. Alfred Challis said it was the merest temper; but was he sorry she didn't go?—Marianne wondered. She rather preferred not going, to say the truth, but she would have liked Titus to be really sorry. And even though she had known just as well that he was only pretending he wanted her to come too, she would have liked him to pretend a little better. If he had done this, she would really have enjoyed his absence a great deal more, and it would have helped her to believe she didn't enjoy it. She honestly wanted to.

Because she was one of those housekeepers who reconcile good housekeeping with what they call a little peace and quiet. These ends are contributed to by the temporary abeyance of the household. Scarcely by its permanent absence—that would alter the character of the position altogether. This position was that an unendurable stress of responsibility was borne by the house's mistress in her position, so to speak, of ship's master. The navigation rested entirely on her shoulders, and the Captain meddled. Captains seldom did anything else, and there *was* no peace and quiet until they were at their office in the City, or locked up in their cabin as might be. In that cabin, as in Challis's case, they pursued some private end which had no relation to the stern realities of Life. It might chance, as was admitted in theory, to have something to do with the settlement of weekly accounts—a remote connection of a vague ideal kind. But the keeping of the log, the regulation of the chronometers, the comparison of charts—well, really, it was impossible to attend to them for the fidget, till the Captain was safely entombed in his cabin and out of the way! And Charlotte Eldridge knew all that as well as Marianne did. *She* could understand, if anyone could. As for schoolboys, everybody knew what a boy in a house was; hence, broadly speaking, the sooner he was back at school the better. When home for the holi-

days, there was *no* peace; and it was just as well to look the fact in the face and not be deceived by any false prophets.

However, there was something to be said for the prophets in that Jerusalem at Wimbledon when the nominal head of the household was on a visit in the country, and that dreadful boy was playing cricket and wouldn't be back till late. This September afternoon there was a little peace and quiet at last, and Charlotte Eldridge and Mrs. Challis could chat—at least, till the husband of the former called in on his way from the station to walk home with her across the common. Let the record of their talk be taken anywhere, at random. Take the images of them, also at random, from any one of a thousand semi-detached villas in the suburbs of London, and, if you choose ladies of thirty odd, true centres of the English middle-class, you will have all the description you will want for the present.

"They're not girls. At least, *I* don't call them girls," said Mrs. Challis, shutting the pot-lid on the tea. Then she blew the spirit out, because it wasn't wanted any more.

"Twenty-six and twenty-four," said the other lady. Not an opinion of her own, but a placarding of authorized figures for consideration. They remained in view, neither sanctioned nor censured. Marianne left the point.

"Why aren't they married, is what I look at."

"Looks, perhaps. Or short tempers. Either tells. Does Mr. Challis mention their figures? Because figures go a long way." Mrs. Eldridge seems to speak as an authority. Marianne nods agreement as a general rule. But presently takes exception:

"There would be money," she says. "And that makes a difference. Besides, his letter lays a good deal of stress on one of their figures. I'm never surprised at figures when it's those sort of persons, in girls. They have to." The implication seemed to be that the she-toff, figureless, got suppressed—cancelled somehow.

"He says looks *too,* doesn't he?"

"One of them, certainly. But you can't tell, from men. And it's one thing one time, another another." Here a pause, following a question from Mrs. Eldridge, "Have you stirred it?" and an irrelevant answer, "I don't want it to get too strong," from Mrs. Challis. Then tea. During which the subject is picked up and dropped at intervals, an eye being kept on it throughout. It is like a mouse a cat is warden of.

"I suppose the good-looking one is the one he sees most of. They do." Mrs. Eldridge is enigmatical.

Her friend is almost equally so. "I suppose it's better always to take no notice of it," she says.

"Always better." Decisively, as from an authority.

"The other one carves something, or does art needlework. When grandma was a girl they did painting on velvet—poonah, it was called. Or took likenesses. But then they wore ringlets."

"I know. And their waists were goodness knows where. But they did ruins in water-colours."

"In sepia. Ma has some in a portfolio. Ready for your other cup?" The answer is substantially in the affirmative.

"Don't put the sugar in this time. They're such big lumps . . . . Thanks! . . . Yes, that was before it was Art Things, and Liberty's. They were just regarded as accomplishments where there were daughters. Then, if they became old maids, they kept it up. Because they had such families." This did not mean that the old maids of three generations back created scandals, but that our grandmothers' domestic cares stood in the way of their career as poonah-painters and so forth.

Mrs. Challis cut the cake. Some always wait till this stage of tea to do this. But there are many schools. Then she said: "Titus says it's photography has put an end to all that sort of thing. I shouldn't wonder."

"Nor I." But Mrs. Eldridge adds that she doesn't care about Art Objects for their own sake, though they do for presents. She then picks up the dropped mouse she has had an eye on. "Which is the one that slums?" she asks.

"Oh—both! So does their lady-mother." There is a trace of bitterness in this expression. "But only by the way. I don't suppose they stick to anything."

"What does the good-looking one do?" No immediate answer coming, the speaker throws a light, "Perhaps she's a vegetarian, or antivivisects?"

"No, it's neither of those. But I've no business to tell. Titus said not, in the postscript."

"He wouldn't mind me."

"I don't know, dear. Perhaps it was you he meant. However, you must promise not to tell, if I get the letter."

"My dear!—as if I should tell! You know I never say a word!"

Marianne felt she had done her duty by this letter as she left the room to get it. For had she not honourably resolved not to show it, and even gone the length of locking it into a drawer to prove her resolution? And didn't her getting up from her tea show

what an honourable intent she had been acting under? Oh yes, she had done her duty. Besides, what did it matter?

"Here's his letter. I don't expect he'll be home till Thursday. . . . No, I suppose I mustn't show you the whole. I'll read the bits."

"You hadn't had your tea." Mrs. Eldridge felt quite secure of the mouse, as she knew her husband wouldn't come before 6.30, and the train was always behind. She felt so secure that she interjected a remark on another subject—dress. She saw Marianne had on her plaid, and admitted her wisdom; it had gone so much colder. How those stuffs did last out! It really looked as good as new. Then she recommended those little oblong things with jam in the middle, which she had tried and her hostess hadn't; the latter, though, had bought them at the new confectioner's.

Marianne put the letter safe out of the way of spills and slops, and finished her tea. During which the mouse may be said to have remained on the floor, watched. Then she picked up the letter, and after glancing through a page not germane to the matter, identified that which was. "Here it is," she said, and went on reading:—"'You will be amused at what I think I have found out about Judith, the handsome eldest one I told you of. She is stage-struck—wants to go on the boards! She has not said it directly to me, but I feel pretty certain that a "friend" she tells me of, who has these aspirations, is no other than *herself*. However, I may be mistaken. This is what I judge from: We were sitting on a sofa' . . ." The reader paused, looking on into the text.

Mrs. Eldridge struck in: "Where was the sofa? Does he say where the sofa was?"

"My dear Charlotte!" Marianne expostulated, "*can* it matter? Besides, he *says*—— However, I'll go straight on if you're going to fancy I'm leaving anything out." And then continued, reading fair: ". . . 'on a sofa in the drawing-room after dinner. When she had told me about this friend, having asked me first if I knew lots of actors and actresses, I asked what sort of looking girl the friend was. *I saw her look in a glass on the wall before she answered.* And then she said something rather evasive about beauty being a matter of opinion, and that there was probably enough in this case for working purposes. She had disparaged her friend's performance, as it struck me, out of all proportion to her apparent anxiety to advocate her cause, and a sort of confidence that she would succeed. I put this down to protest of personal modesty, as well as the look in the glass.'"

Marianne paused, saying, "I see that," and Mrs. Eldridge said

also: "I see *that.*" Whereupon the former said, unreasonably: "What *don't* you see?" and her friend replied: "Nothing. Go on." Which Marianne did, after a very slight hesitation, as of doubt.

"'I annex a plan of the position showing the angle at which the mirror was placed, the relative positions of myself and the lady, and our respective images in the glass. So I could see plainly by looking at her reflection that she took a good long look at herself before answering my question.'"

"Is there another cup left, dear?" said Mrs. Eldridge. "Never mind if you haven't. . . ."

"It won't be good," said the tea-maker feelingly. But the applicant said never mind, that would do! She liked it strong. But might she look at the plan? She would promise not to read. There was nothing there she needn't read, said her friend. Nevertheless, she folded back the script behind the rough bird's-eye view, with dotted lines of sight to show how things had worked.

"Well!" said Marianne, as she handed the cup of tea—which didn't look bad.

"I don't believe the sofa was half as long as that."

"Charlotte—you're ridiculous!"

"Well, I *don't!* Now go on reading. . . . 'She took a good long look at herself. . . .'" Mrs. Eldridge considered whether she should reveal the thought in her mind that Mr. Challis must also have taken a good long look to know. No!—she would not! Whatever she was, she was not a mischief-maker; and to prove this to her own satisfaction, she not infrequently abstained from saying something about a lady and gentleman. She often found an opportunity of doing this, as she never thought on any subject not spiced with both. Satisfaction to conscience through this abstention would be sure to result in free handling soon after. Also, the abstention was easy to her this time, because she believed—rightly or wrongly—that Marianne knew she was making it.

Perhaps rightly, but no outward sign to that effect came. Marianne glanced forward in the letter, and went on reading: "'This young woman, I fancy, is savagely jealous of the younger sister posing as an active promoter of all sorts of upnesses-to-date. . . .' I wish," said the reader parenthetically, "that Titus wouldn't use such unusual expressions. I dare say they are very clever, but I don't profess to understand . . . what? . . . Oh, of course, I see what he *means,* but it's a kind of thing I shall never understand. . . . No, my dear Charlotte!—it's no use talking and trying to persuade me. 'Upnesses-to-date'—just fancy!" Now

Titus had been in two minds whether to allow this phrase to remain, but had decided to do so, as better on the whole than to provoke speculation over an obliterated text. *He* might have speculated himself over such an erasure.

"I don't think it implies anything," said Mrs. Eldridge, meaning, of course, anything about a lady and gentleman. "I fancy he is only referring to Art Movements and Liberty silks and things. Go on." And Marianne read:

"'All sorts of upnesses-to-date, doing things her grandmothers would have thought *infra dig.* . . .' What does that mean?"

"Lord, Marianne!—*that* doesn't mean anything. Do go on. Only what they would be too swell to do! That's all." Marianne continued:

"'*Infra dig.,* while she herself is not allowed to try her luck and face the music. She has the courage for it, evidently. Old Norman blood! By-the-bye, I've been damning William the Conqueror up and down ever since I came. For the old cock is besotted about him. Says he was the first Socialist, and never talks of anything else!' . . . It's not interesting, this!" She stopped.

"No—that's not interesting. I want to hear more about the girl's looks. Couldn't you find what he says about her figure? You said he laid stress on it."

"In his other letter. Tall and striking. Dignified kind of girl."

"I should hardly call that laying stress on her *figure,* as such." Mrs. Challis reflects upon this rather paradoxical view of her friend's. She is not as clear as she might be often over her husband's elisions and hyperboles, and does not feel sure she reported him rightly. "Perhaps," she says, "I should not have said 'laid stress on.'" Her friend says oh no!—"laid stress on" was all right. But there was some indeterminateness in what he was said to have laid stress on. However, Mrs. Eldridge excuses further elucidation. "Sure there's nothing more about that girl?" she asks.

"Yes, there's some more somewhere. Oh—here! . . . 'As to the lovely Judith, of course, she might prove a duffer behind the footlights. But then, again, she mightn't. She's the very thing for Aminta Torrington in "Mistaken Delicacy."' That's the name his new play's to be called. I liked 'Atalanta in Paddington' better myself."

"Not nearly such a good title. No! If 'Mistaken Delicacy' hasn't been had a dozen times before, there couldn't be a better

title. Of course, he wants her to play in it. What else is there?"

"'Very thing for Aminta Torrington. . . .' Oh yes!—it's here . . . 'and I shall try to get her to see Prester John about it' . . . that's what they call Mr.—what's his name?—the manager at the Megatherium, don't you know? . . . 'about it, and see if we couldn't drill her up to performance point. She couldn't be a total . . .' something crossed out. . . ."

"Let me look . . . oh no—that's nothing! Only *fiasco*. It's the same as failure." Mrs. Eldridge retained the letter and went on reading, unopposed. The erasure had clearly been an almost insultingly merciful one, to meet a defective knowledge half-way. She went on reading, scrapwise, half inaudibly at times; sometimes saying "hm-hm-hm," to stand for omissions. . . . "'Couldn't be a total failure, because it isn't every day . . . thing happens . . . sort of Court-beauty . . . good family . . . make a set-off against inexperience . . .' hm-hm! . . . 'elocution very good, as far as I can judge. . . .' I don't see any more about her." Mrs. Eldridge read a good deal more of the letter to make sure of the point, although Marianne reached out her hand to take it back. The latter lady was looking rather nettled. She knew that *fiasco* meant *fizzle* perfectly well, and it was ridiculous of Titus to treat her like a schoolgirl.

Those who know the sort of person this young mater-familias in a plain dress was, must know also what she meant by the phrase "a proper pride." It is easy for superior persons—toffs of birth, toffs of Science, Letters, Art—to decide that this phenomenon is a ridiculous egotism in anything so middle, so Victorian, so redolent of Leech or Cruikshank as Marianne Challis; to pronounce it an outcome of a simple incapacity to realize her own insignificance. Gracious mercy!—suppose we were all suddenly to "realize" our own insignificance! . . . But really the subject is not one that will bear thinking of. Dismiss your insignificance with a caution! And pray for a cloudy sky, that the stars may not remind you of it.

When Charlotte Eldridge had read all down the next page of the letter, she surrendered it to the hand that was waiting for it. But, even then, not without a glance down the following one as she let it go. Her friend apologized for taking it away.

"I shouldn't mind your reading it all, dear," she said. "But as I promised . . .!"

"Quite right, dear!" And both these ladies felt they had made a sacrifice to Duty. The letter wasn't to be shown, and a great deal of it had *not* been shown. What more could the most ex-

acting ask? How many ideals are as nearly attained in this imperfect world?

"However, there's nothing in what you haven't seen that could have interested you in the very least." Having made out a good case for Conscience, why weaken it? But probably Mrs. Challis is unaware that she does so. "No!—there's not a word more about the girl." This is in answer to a question that could hardly remain unanswered merely because nobody had asked it. The negative chilled the conversation. *Why* was there not a word more about the girl?

A disturbance upstairs caused Mrs. Challis to get up and leave the room. It was those children. Oh dear, what little plagues they were! Presently she came back, explanatory. She believed it was really that odious girl Martha's fault. She would have to get rid of her. But Titus always sided with the girl, and that made it so difficult. . . . What was it this time? . . . Oh, the child wanted the iron. Martha was ironing, and of course paying no attention, and Emmie had burnt herself. No—not badly; but a nasty burn! Marianne's style does not favour definition.

The two ladies sit on into the twilight—early, from a southeast wind bringing the town-fog westward—and are less talkative. The slow-combustion grate's first snail-like manifestations this year—for the weather has been mild till to-day—begin to glimmer in a half-dusk favourable to their detection. The children will be down directly to say good-night. One can't talk till they are done with and out of the way. Presently they come, but are not allowed to rush to the cake at once. They shall have some directly. The casualty, Emmie, who yelled, exhibits an arm between four and five years old with a scar on it. She consents to goldbeater's skin on condition that she licks the place herself. But what did that matter when there was cake? All children have but one relation to cake. They *want* it, and when that piece is done, they want another the same size, or larger. These two were quite one with their kind on this point, but they took the first piece behind a sofa to devour it; even as a Royal Bengal Tiger at the Zoological carries away a horror a vegetarian would die of into his bedroom, lest you should get it and eat it first. But they came out for more; which the tiger never does, because he knows it isn't any use, and prefers to pretend he doesn't care to ask favours and be refused.

"I shall give them a couple of grains of Dover's powder apiece," said their mother. "They've had nothing for a month." This good lady held with the practice of a dose now and again, independent of symptoms. "If it were not for me, they would be

left altogether without medicine. It's a thing their father always opposes me about." The words "Dover's powder" were said a little too soon to be unheard by the persons concerned, and the consequence was that Emmie, the younger one, bit Martha, the nurse, going upstairs. However, this incident, with the ructions that arose from it, was closed in time; and a little more peace and quiet followed in its wake.

"I wonder at your husband and that Martha girl. Look at her teeth!"

"My dear Charlotte, Titus quite likes Martha, compared to Harmood, whose teeth are really good, considering that she only takes sixteen pounds." Harmood was the house-and-parlourmaid—a special antipathy of the great author's.

"Well!—I wonder at it, is all I can say. They go so much by teeth. Besides, look at the way she hooks her dress. The whole thing! You may depend on it that Mr. Challis is only doing it for a blind, because Harmood's pretty. . . ."

"Doing what for a blind?"

"Oh, my dear child, what a silly you are! You know perfectly well what I mean. That sort of thing. He wants you to think he hasn't any eyes, and makes believe to prefer the ugly one. Lots of husbands go on like that—only simpletons never see anything."

"I can't see that it makes any difference to me, either way."

"Very well, dear! Look at it your own way. Only don't blame me and say I didn't tell you!"

Marianne wanted to say something sharp to her friend, but could not, owing to lack of constructive power in emergencies. However, as that lady closed with a snap, even as a moral physician who had written a prescription and done her duty, there was time to consider an extempore—an *ex multo tempore*, one might say.

"I wish you would say exactly what you mean, Charlotte."

"What about? About the servants?"

"No. About Titus."

"My dear Marianne, it isn't any use talking about it. A woman in your position has to expect it. . . ."

"Yes! But expect what?"

"If you won't interrupt me, I'll tell you. Of course, you know I know perfectly well your husband is to be trusted, and all that sort of thing. He has too much genuine regard for you. But I always have thought, and always shall think, that men can't help themselves. . . ."

"What for? I mean, why do you go on raking up? Can't you leave alone?"

"That's just what I was going to say, dear! Especially in this case. Because there's really no need, if you come to think of it. I'll tell you, dear, exactly what I should *recommend* you to do—what *I* should do if I were in your place. I should either say *absolutely nothing,* or if I said anything at all, just make it chaff—talk about his new flame—say you will evidently have to get somebody else, don't you see? As if it was entirely out of the question! Or perhaps that would be dangerous, and it wouldn't do to have him thinking you suspected him of fancying you weren't in earnest. No!—on the whole, I recommend saying *absolutely nothing.*"

Marianne's brain refuses to receive complications beyond a certain point. She picks up the last intelligible phrase. "As if *what* was entirely out of the question?"

But Mrs. Eldridge is on her guard against making mischief. "You mustn't run away with the idea that I said there *was* anything," is the form her caution takes. And then, in response to an angry flush on her friend's face, "I'm sure there isn't the slightest reason for you to be uneasy. I have far too much faith in your husband to suppose such a thing possible for one moment. . . . No, indeed, dear!—even if she gets him to get her into this play of his—and then, of course, they would go on seeing each other—I shouldn't feel the smallest uneasiness. Because look at her social position!"

"What *has* her social position got to do with it?"

Mrs. Eldridge elevates her eyebrows, and perhaps her shoulders, slightly, as though asking space what next? But she brings both down to the level of her friend's knowledge of the world before answering: "I should have said *everything.* A woman in her position doesn't commit herself in any way with a man in your husband's, however distinguished he may be. Read any divorce case of that sort of people, and see if they don't have co-respondents of condition. Of course, I'm not speaking of disgraceful cases, where the woman isn't received after. But ordinary divorce cases in Fashionable Life."

"I can't see what you're talking about, Charlotte."

"Then I can't help it, dear. But I should have thought it was pretty plain, for all that!"

Marianne laughs, a little uneasily. "Do you mean to say, Charlotte, that because Titus goes away for a week to a country-house . . .?"

"Go on, dear." But Marianne is not constitutionally a sentence-finisher. She begins again:

"Why isn't Titus to speak to a lady without a preach about it?"

"My dear child, nobody's preaching. If you were to listen to me, instead of becoming impatient . . ."

"I'm not impatient! But you know it's irritating, and you can't deny it."

"Very well, dear, I don't then. But let me finish what I was saying. If you had listened to me, you would have seen my meaning. I was all the time exonerating your husband from the suspicion of even the slightest flirtation with this showy girl. I was trying to make your mind easy about them, and to say that even if they *are* rather thrown together—as of course they must be, because one knows what country-houses are . . ."

"Now, Charlotte, that *is* nonsense! Why are country-houses any different from town-houses? What stuff!" Marianne sees a light on the horizon. She knows about country-houses, because she was a girl in the country once. But much of her friend's analyses and insights had been so much unqualified Sordello to her, and had left her brain spinning. She can and will hold fast that which is good, and stick to the country-houses. And clearly, if she can prove that country and town houses are on all fours for the purposes of Charlotte's world—a world where a sort of dowdy Eros dodders respectably about, all the Greek fire knocked out of him—then a stopper will be put on these suggestions of infidelities. She does not see all the connecting-links, but would like to unhorse her opponent somehow.

That lady is also ready to let the issue turn provisionally on town and country-house life. But this is for a reason of her own. She pursues the subject: "It's *not* stuff, dear. There's all the difference in the world. In country-houses people split up into couples, and there's no check. Chaperones on long walks, of course!—only they can't go so quick, and get left behind. In town, no such thing. And there's really no such thing as staying with, in town, either. Practically! Of course, now and again friends from the country to stay a few days. But it isn't the same thing, going to the Royal Academy and the New Gallery. The Zoological Gardens is a good deal more like, only scarcely anybody goes. Wasn't that John's knock?"

It was, apparently, and was followed by John's pocket-handkerchief—at least, that was how a very loud noise was inexactly classified. Whatever its proper name was, it caused its promoter's wife to fear his cold was worse. He must have his feet in mustard and hot water. But his attitude was, when he had replaced the con-

tingent remainder of the noise—a real pocket-handkerchief—in his pocket, that his cold was nearly well, and no human power should induce him to submit to treatment of any sort; but mustard and hot water least of all. He would go and have a Turkish Bath, and kill himself. Not that *he* anticipated a fatal result; his wife forecast that for him. It transpired shortly that he habitually set himself in opposition to all her wishes, and went his own way. But in so doing he encountered frequent disasters, his rescues from which were always achieved by her, single-handed, with constant addition to a long score of debt, unpaid by him, on account of which he never so much as said, thank you!

Mr. Eldridge was a person who defied description, in a certain sense; but only because description calls for materials, and he supplied none, or nearly none. He might have been the Average Man himself, for any salient point that he presented. An observant person, called on to recollect what he was like, would probably have remembered that he shaved, all but a little whisker, and given up the rest of him to oblivion.

His conversation, after the Turkish Bath had passed away, was an inquiry if his wife was ready; and, after he had been told not to fuss, but to sit down and make himself agreeable, a statement that it was a good deal colder than yesterday. So it afforded a natural opportunity to his good lady of giving him a chance to enrich it by comment on the subject in hand at the time of his arrival. She did not wish to drop it, having, in fact—as hinted above—a purpose in dwelling on it.

"We're talking about country-houses," said she.

"What houses?" said he; and then, without waiting for an answer: "Oh—country-houses! Where?"

"Don't pretend to be stupid, John. Nowhere, of course! No particular houses—country-houses in general. And town-houses."

"Oh, I see! What about 'em? How's the children?"

"Never mind them! Listen to me." Marianne interjected that perhaps they hadn't gone to bed, and she could ring for Martha to see. But she didn't do it, and no one urged it. So the children lapsed, and Mrs. Eldridge proceeded: "Pay attention to what I'm saying, John, and put that glass down. You'll break it." He did as he was bid. "We—*are*—*talking*—*about*—the differences between country-houses and town-houses." To which Mr. Eldridge replied, "Oh, ah!—yes, to be sure! Well!—you'd have to see 'em both," causing his wife to despair visibly of male intelligence, with endurance, before starting afresh with an appearance of willingness to make things easy for a slow apprehension: "We were talk-

ing about the difference of the way one lives, in town and in the country. Nothing to *do* with premises."

She then went on to put a hypothetical case, to enable her husband to grasp the full range of the recent conversation. Supposing that he had been a young man enamoured of a damsel whose sentiments towards himself were a matter of conjecture—suppose, in fact, he were "paying attention"; that was how the lady put it—would he prefer to press his suit in a town-house or a country-house? She made the question a leading one by suggesting divine solitudes congenial to the development of tender passions, and a climate favourable to the inspection of sunsets and moonrises. So tempting was the prospect to the mind of her hearer that he made a grimace expressive of greedy delight, and gave a low whistle. "'Ooky!" said he, dropping an aspirate humorously. "Country-houses—rather!"

"*Any* man would say so at once, Marianne." Which Mrs. Eldridge contrives to articulate in a way that implies, Heaven knows how, that their discussion has had application to some particular case—no mere abstract review of the subject. For the apprehension of her husband is reached, with the effect that he says, with an expression of roused interest: "I say, Lotty, tell up. Who's the party? Who's at it now?" But he does not press for information, because his wife checks him skilfully with, "Hush, John!—never mind now! I'll tell you after." His comment, "Some gal, I suppose," suggests some lucid vision into life and character beyond its drain on the resources of language.

Marianne Challis would have entered joyously enough with her friend into the building up of a situation involving only a neighbour's husband or wife, but she would fain have put a brake on the car of Gossip in her own husband's case. The worst of it was that every word she had said so far, with that intention, had only brought about an increase of speed. And now she was conscious that if she put in any protest of her faith in her husband's stability, matters would be made ten times worse. The horses would get the bit in their teeth. At least, his name had not been mentioned, nor the company he was in, before this stupid John Eldridge. All this, or the protoplasm of it, hung about her mind as she began saying, "If you mean . . ." and stopped. But she had, even with those three words, put her head in the lion's mouth past recall. Her friend interrupted.

"I don't mean to say a *single—word—more,* dear, to you or to anyone. So don't be uneasy. But you see what John thinks." The speaker, as she rose to her feet with these words, as one

gathering up for departure, showed as a young woman in black, of a lissome, yet angular type; taller than her friend, and with more claim, from personal experience of her own figure, to sit in judgment on other women's. But her complexion is not as good as Marianne's—a rather sallow one, not free from a sense of freckles. However, that may only be the firelight.

John, merely conscious that something male and female was under discussion, had put on what he conceived to be the proper look for the father of a family equal to all moral emergencies. His face would have served just as well for that of a person doing subtraction with a sense of responsibility. This ambiguity of outward rendering of the phases of his mind, of course, gave corresponding latitude to his wife's interpretation of it.

Marianne had a growing misgiving that she was becoming skilfully entangled in the meshwork of an undeserved embarrassment, and floundered in desperation. "I don't the least understand what you *mean,* Charlotte," she said. "What *does* he think? What *about?*" On this he asserted himself.

"No, I say, you know! Don't bring *me* in—don't bring *me* in! *I* know nothing, you know—nothing at all, you know! Mum's the word, you know—always keep out of this sort of thing!" He enforced his words by pursing up his mouth and shaking his head continuously, in a kind of paroxysm of caution. He also turned somewhat purple, and his eyes grew smaller. These combinations put the finishing-touch on the strength of his wife's position. She threw up a new and final entrenchment, and, as it were, closed the subject officially.

"You do—quite—right, John," said she, "to keep out of it. That's all you've got to do." She then assumed quite suddenly a large-hearted tone of liberality. "And, after all," she said, "what does it all come to? Just nothing whatever! I'm sure, dear Marianne, you need not allow yourself to feel the *least* uneasiness —not for a moment! With a husband like yours! Only think! You'll see it will be all right, dear—just recollect what I say! Now we must go. I'll go and get my cloak—it's upstairs. No!—don't *you* come. . . ." But Marianne goes, for all that.

Mr. Eldridge, left to himself, whistled a monotonous tune over and over again, and flicked a glove that was on with another that was off. He threw his eyes opener by fits and starts, as if he were trying on a new pair of lids. Then he produced the vanished pocket-handkerchief, and held it by two corners before him, spread out, as though he admired the pattern. Then, as though he decided suddenly that it was not Saint Veronica's, he availed him-

self of it as a resource of civilization, and returned it resolutely to his pocket. We are not responsible for this gentleman's actions, and can only record, without explanation, that he then said quite distinctly, "Pum, pum, pum!" and slapped his hands heavily together. He added: "Time's gettin' on"—a remark equally true of all periods. Then he listened to the voices of the two ladies returning down the stairs.

"Oh no!—you needn't be the *least* afraid about John. He's discretion itself in a thing of this sort. And you'll see it will be just as I say. When your dear husband comes back it will all be *exactly* the same, and . . ." Here her voice dropped, and John listened hard, but missed a great deal. . . . "So now, dear, you will promise to be quite happy about it, and not let yourself fret. Won't you?"

"But, Charlotte dear, it's all about *nothing*. . . ."

"That's the right view to take, dear. That's just exactly what it *is*—all about nothing! Now let's try and be happy, and not think about it. John!—where are you? Do come and let's be off! I hope it isn't raining."

"Pavement was dry enough when *I* came in," was Mr. Eldridge's testimony. To corroborate it he went out in the front garden and gazed upwards, open-mouthed. "Oh no—*it's* not raining, fast enough," said he. Which seemed to imply that perhaps something else was.

Marianne went back into her parlour and rang the bell for Elizabeth Barclay to come and take away the tea-things, because Harmood was out for her holiday. She looked and felt flushed and irritated, but could not have said whether it was with Charlotte Eldridge, with herself, or with this showy girl at Royd. With all her stupidity—and she had plenty—she was not wanting in loyalty to her husband; although it may be a good deal of this loyalty was only a form "proper pride"—that is to say, *amour propre*—took. How one wonders that commonplace, uninteresting people should have any *amour propre*—should love those insipid selves of theirs at all! But they have it—the dullest of them.

As she sat there in the growing dusk, watching the slow-combustion stove economizing its coal, and making attempts to consume its own smoke, her soul was doing battle on its own behalf against the insidious siren Jealousy, who came and came and came again each time she thrust her contemptuously away. Had she, perhaps, despised her a little too roundly when her first whispers were audible? Had she treated them too much as an absurdity

when her husband's first great success had been followed by a sudden uplifting of him into a world she resented—resented because the only part she could play in it had been a very minor one? Had she taken it too easily for granted that no harm would come if he went his way and she hers—she, who didn't mean to be patronized, whoever else did! Might it not have been really wiser to brace herself up to the bearing of one or two slights and humiliations, to laugh them off and acknowledge that a homely, uneducated woman of her sort must needs fall contentedly into a back rank, rather than to refuse indignantly to march with the army at all? *She* was not going to be tolerated, and made allowances for, not she!—that was her attitude. That Arkroyd woman would have been just civil to her in time, no doubt; but how about all the affronts and indignities she would have had to put up with during apprenticeship? No—it was best as it was: Titus to go his way and she hers! Besides, her being constantly hatching him would do no good, if there *were*—that is to say, if there *had been*—any truth in this nonsense of Charlotte's. But, really, it was all so idiotic. As if she couldn't trust Titus for five minutes away from her apron-strings! Of course, Titus was to be trusted! . . . Was he?

She got up and walked about the room in the flickering firelight, conscious of her heart-beats, and half-inclined to cry, if she could have chosen. But her eyes felt dry over it, as a matter of fact. She caught herself beginning to feel angry with Titus, convicted herself of it, and reprimanded the culprit severely. Idiot that she was, to be affected by mere unfounded gabble! For she was far from believing, all the while, that Charlotte had any faith in her own insinuations. She fully recognized that her friend's pleasure in dwelling on the constructive relations of Paul and Virginia, Paolo and Francesca, Adam and Eve, for that matter—anywhom male and female, anywhere—was only human sympathy, leavened with hysteria. Had she not helped her, *lubens et ex animo*, when the improper study of mankind seemed good to their hours of leisure? The study, that is, of man and womankind in braces, selected by the student? But when the model suggested for study was her own husband, in leash with a strange young lady, whom she had not seen, she felt the position of a philosophical analyst uncongenial.

Why could she not be angry with Charlotte? That might have seemed the most natural safety-valve. Marianne had never read "Othello"—or much to speak of else—but she had seen it at the play. So she may easily have recalled Iago's cautions against the green-eyed monster that doth make the meat it feeds on, and com-

pared it with the way her friend had somehow contrived to appear a warning voice, crying beware! to a suspicious soul adrift in a wilderness of its own unreason. She was not so very unlike the Moor in her ready acceptance of the character *her* Iago had claimed for herself. Of course, Charlotte was a fool, and fanciful; but, equally of course, she was no mischief-maker. Why, see what a perfect faith she had in Titus's integrity! Marianne was angry with herself for allowing a doubt of it, without having the shrewdness to see that she never would have felt one if it had not been for Charlotte. In fact, left to herself in the growing darkness, to brood over her own scarcely fledged suspicion, she could not for the life of her have said what on earth began it all. She forgot all details of her conversation with Charlotte, and only knew that something in it had made her feel very uncomfortable.

Really, one is sometimes inclined to believe that imps of darkness hang about, to run and help whenever they see a little bit of mischief brewing.

CHAPTER X

CHALLIS'S *adieu* TO MISS ARKROYD. A LONG RIDE HOME, AND A COLD WELCOME. BUT IT WAS JOLLY TO BE BACK, AT ANY RATE. MISS ARKROYD'S MESSAGE DELIVERED

MARIANNE'S loving Tite did not come back at the time he had appointed—not by many days. He postponed doing so in order to go back on the same day as Mr. Brownrigg, whose society he had begun to find rather amusing. Their departure together was again postponed in order that they might travel up in company with William Rufus and Lord Felixthorpe, with whom both had come to be on the best of terms, after each had denounced either to the other, in the strictest confidence, as purse-proud, rank-proud, toffish, and standoffish. They had collated their respective observations of the ingrained vices of Aristocracy, and found that they agreed. But, then, after they had unpacked their hearts with unprejudiced and candid criticism, they had suddenly *volte face*'d, and discerned that there was always a Something you could not define about people of this sort. They had both noticed this singular fact, and each was supplied by it with an insight into the unusual powers of penetration of the other. It was a curious coincidence that both had acquired a consciousness of this Something by comparing the courteous demeanour and graceful hospitality of their host with what they found it impossible to describe as anything but the Plebeian Vulgarity of the sitting Conservative member for the borough. Mr. Ramsey Tomes caught it hot. Then look at the indescribable grace of Lady Arkroyd, and contrast it with the dowdy *personnel* and awkward manners of the political gentleman's wife. Why!—*there* was a woman, her ladyship to wit, who could be as rude as she pleased to anyone, and the indefinable Something came in and carried it off!

Was it the indefinable Something, or a very easily definable Nothing-of-the-Sort, that brought about a still further delay in Alfred Challis's return home? Probably the latter, in the form of the gradual cordiality that comes to folk living in the same house under auspicious circumstances, and goes on growing till quarrelling time. It was of less importance when once he had

overstayed his return-ticket; and the final outcome of two or three postponements, each to await a reinforcement to the homeward-bound Londoners, was that the bulk of the Royd house-party caught the two o'clock train ten days behind the date of Mr. Challis's promised return to his domestic hearth, and arrived at Euston in a drizzling mist, which knew that summer had gone, and had the atmosphere all to itself.

The porter that carried his portmanteau and his game—a hare and partridges, with which was associated a promise of pheasants next month—to a four-wheeler, might have noticed that the literary-looking gentleman and the good-looking young lady in blue said good-bye a great deal—in fact, until a carriage called out to know whether the latter was coming or not. But this porter's name was Onions, and he had no soul, except one that was wrapped up in remuneration. So he accepted fourpence and saw nothing.

But he might have. And also he might have heard the following conversation between the good-looking—or best-looking—young lady and the gentleman, after the latter had made sure that his selected four-wheeler was prepared to go as far as Wimbledon.

"Now, Mr. Challis, I know you're not to be trusted to give my message to your wife. . . ."

"Yes, I am. She's to write you a line to say when she'll be at home."

"Stupid man! Now you know quite well it was nothing as bold as that. No, dear Mr. Challis, tell her I don't want to make a formal 'call.' I want to know her—as well as I know you. And I never shall unless we see each other quietly, when there's no one else there. Oh dear!—if only people I want to know would give me a cup of tea and say 'not at home' to everyone else!"

"I should myself! But I quite understand. I'll wrap up the message to Marianne exactly to that effect. She shall write and fix a day. And I'm not to be there—that's it, isn't it?"

"That's it. Good man! And you understand that I'm entirely in earnest about Aminta Torrington—(all right! Nobody can hear. They're all in the carriage)—and you're to speak to Mr. Magnus at the Megatherium about it."

"Oh yes! I'm going to speak. Honour bright!"

"Very well, then! Now good-bye, Mr. Challis."

"Good-bye. I *have* had a pleasant time." But Mr. Onions heard none of this, as, while he was disposing of the portmanteau, his attention was engaged by conversation with the cabman.

"Where's Wimbledon, Honey?" the latter had said, as he took

the box from him. He seemed over-ripe, did this cabman. He could not fall off the box, though, for he had bound himself to it by tarpaulins of an inflexible nature. "Honey" was not Irish: it was short for "Onions."

"What's the use of askin' me, when you know yourself? Mean to say you don't?"

"I was born there, my son. I've lived there ever since. Likewise, I'm going to hend my days there, exceptin' I should 'appen to live for ever. I was just a-puttin' the question to see if *you* knew."

"Couldn't say to harf an inch where it is. But it's a place *you* get a pint at, every wisit."

"Right you are, my son! . . . All right, governor—just off, as soon as these cloths are tucked in. You never mentioned any 'urry, or I'd have seen to it!"

And then Royd and its luxurious life have finally vanished, and everyday life has come back, as the cab growls through its rather long ride. Challis was paying the penalty of coming home by a different route, and now almost wished he hadn't made up his mind to cab the whole way. But you know what it is when you have a large portmanteau that won't go on a hansom.

If it had not been for the hare and partridges, he could have managed to consider the whole thing a dream. This would have been an advantage; for no one stickles at finding waking life dull after a fascinating sleep-experience. Do not we all rather love to rub it into our waking surroundings how sweet that place was in the dream, how bright those skies and seas were, how lovable that—well, usually—person of the opposite sex was? Are you, if you are a lady, prepared to deny this last item? Not that this concerns the story, for there they were—the hare and partridges. And the memories they brought back clashed with the long perspectives of street-lamps in the drizzle, and the reflections of them; and the male umbrellas and female umbrellas bobbing endlessly past below them, or waiting for a bus that somebody may get out of, just there; and the busses that stopped to shed their passengers and fill up again with Heaven-favoured fresh ones—while they, the umbrellas, waited—and made the hearts of those no umbrella could keep dry sick with Hope deferred. This hare and partridges, fur-soft and feather-soft, though cold to the touch, were full of suggestions of the life that had been switched off finally just now at Euston Station. But then, of course—Challis ought to have recollected this, and he felt it—they were equally full of suggestion of where they were going to be devoured. Was he not going home

to Marianne, and the children, and his snug little writing-room looking out on the Common across the garden, where he was on no account to be disturbed? The very word "home" had a magic in it, and so forth: consult Literature, *passim!* . . .

No, really, it was too absurd to allow his nasty cynical tone to creep into his thoughts—here in Hyde Park; for that was the Marble Arch, and the cab was making a good record—when in less than an hour he would be back among his Lares and Penates. As he got nearer home he found that the fire of pleasurable anticipation he had lighted began to crackle and burn up of its own accord, without further effort on his part. How he wished he could invent a word for that confounded hypothetical wickedness—treachery or what not—that nervous imaginatives impute to themselves, knowing its unreality all the while!

He had never allowed himself to believe for one moment that Royd owed any of its charm for him to anything but . . . well! —a sort of general summary of the charms of a big wealthy country-house full of pleasant people with balances at their Bankers'. So he expressly vetoed the idea that in the dream he was now waking from, as he neared the Hermitage and Marianne, there was any one individual that played a predominant part. He vetoed it in obedience to that groundless guilt of conscience he was going to find a name for. But for that he would have let it alone.

He would have to find that name, to brand the intolerable nuisance; to denounce it by it, when it appeared. Then he might look it in the face unflinchingly, when it told him to snub his memory for remembering so vividly the sunset-glow on his companion's face, that day they walked back from the Rectory. What a luxury it would be to give this phenomenon its proper place! As, for instance, Mental Astigmatism—something of that sort! The more syllables the better! Let him see!—didn't *aischune* in Greek mean disgrace, or guilt? How would *pseudæschynomorphism* serve the turn? Long enough, anyhow, to convince a Grand Jury. . . .

Well, it was this—no need to say the long name every time; at least, until the Jury should be empanelled!—that was galling the kibe of his mind at every chance thought of Judith Arkroyd that came into it. Why, in Heaven's name, should he not dwell with pleasure on her eyes, which were public property; on her lips, which he did not propose to interfere with; on the touch of her hand at parting, which, by-the-bye, had gone the round of the male units as the party broke up? He was not going to appropriate a larger share than Felixthorpe, for instance, whom he thought a

very nice chap; or Brownrigg, for that matter! Or . . . but no! —one must draw a line somewhere. Let Mr. Ramsey Tomes keep his fat hand to himself! At which point Pseudetcetera—(that would do for the present)—said aloud: "Come, Alfred Challis, what business have you with the word *desecration* in your mind in connection with this part of the business?" He rebuked the phenomenon, giving it its name in full.

He was no match for it, though; and it ended by scoring. "Should I be here at all," it said, "if Marianne were . . .?" He brushed the question aside, but his heart knew the end of it. Marianne wasn't. . . .

However, it was all Pseudetcetera, anyhow! Judith Arkroyd was cultivating him from a purely selfish motive—this rather bitterly; and as for Marianne, was he not really glad to be back again, and wouldn't it be a pleasure to . . . to present her with the hare and partridges, and facilitate the housekeeping?

As to Miss Arkroyd's proposal to call, he did not know how it would be received. Perhaps he would have to tell Marianne that she really must be a sensible woman, and a Woman of the World.

Anyhow—and he drifted into a self-interested channel with some sense of relief—it would never do to have what might be a golden prospect for his play thwarted. He had only imperfect means, so far, of guessing what Judith would sound like behind the footlights; but as to what she would *look* like, that was a thing there could be *no* misgiving about. . . . Why!—the horse was walking. Actually, Putney Hill! What a much better lot of four-wheelers had come on the streets lately! In a quarter of an hour he would be at home; and really very glad—honour bright!—to be back with Marianne.

When any lady or gentleman comes back from an absence, in a cab with luggage on it—however passionate may have been her or his longing for a corresponding him or her who may have been (or might have been) watching at the door for its arrival, or however much the two of them may feel disposed to

> "Stand tranced in long embraces
> Mixt with kisses sweeter, sweeter
> Than anything on earth"—

they usually find, in practice, that it is necessary to stand matters over, because of the cab. This does not, of course, apply to where a man-servant is kept, who can pay fares dogmatically, and conduct himself like the Pope in Council. But where the yearnings

of both parties have to be suppressed all through a discussion of the fare and a repulse of the unemployed, whose services have been anticipated by your own mercenaries . . . well!—do what you will in the way of cordiality afterwards, it *is* chilling, and you can't deny it. We know we are putting this in a very homely way, but this is a very homely subject.

If that over-ripe cabman had shown a different spirit, and accepted the shilling or so too much that Challis offered him, and gone his way in silence, who knows what course events would have taken in the Challis household? But he not only said, "*My* fare's nine shillings!" but came down from his box as one comes down from a box when one's mind is thoroughly made up, and one ain't going to stand any more of one's ex-fare's trifling. He also unbuttoned a series of coats, and produced from his inner core a pocket-book, supposed to contain documentary evidence of some sort. It was eight mile o' ground, and three on 'em outside the radius. Challis was irritated at the low valuation put on his understanding by this cabman, and disputed a point he would have given way on had an appeal been made to the goodness of his heart to shut his eyes to obvious truth in the interest of extortion. He was also obsessed by a woe-begone creature who had run all the way from Putney Bridge to assist with the one portmanteau, but had been headed off by Martha and Elizabeth Barclay. Who, thus intercepted, had substituted a moral claim on account of the distance no one had asked him to cover for a legal claim for carrying a portmanteau into a house, and making the latter smell of his wardrobe till properly aired and the mats shook next day. The consequence of which was that, when the cabman had reconstituted himself on his box, under protest, and departed, Challis, eager to make up for the postponement of his greeting by a good husbandly *accolade,* found himself met by, "As soon as you've done with the man!" and, turning, perceived an injured being touching a soaked cap, and awaiting recognition or execration in a spirit of meekness, but quite determined not to go away without a settlement.

"Run all the way from Putney, have you? What the devil did you do it for? Nobody asked you." Here a gratuity, of coppers.

"Won't you make it up a shillin', Captain? It *is* 'ard, when a man's been out all day looking for a chance, and walked all over Battersea and Chelsea and round Brixton—ask anybody if I ain't! —and nobody to 'elp me to a job or say the word for me. . . . Thank ye kindly, Captain!"—here more coppers, this mode of

address proving irresistible—"only if it was made up to a shillin' I could get my tools out of pawn, being a carpenter by trade. . . ."

Challis pushed the door to in the man's face with something like an oath. Then at last he got a moment's leisure for his overdue kiss, which he paid liberally, as he said: "Well, it *is* jolly to be back, at any rate! How are the kids?" For, whatever the malady he had made the awkward name for had been, he wasn't going to show any consciousness of it.

"The children you mean? There's nothing the matter with them that I know of. Now make haste; because it's a small leg. If I'd thought you were going to be so late it could have been rumpsteak."

Challis looked at his watch. "H'm!" said he. Which meant that seven-forty was not so enormously late, and really more elastic arrangements might have been contrived. "I shouldn't have time for a warm bath, should I?"

"I must tell Elizabeth Barclay, then. I dare say she can keep the meat back. Only say!"

"Oh, it don't matter, if there's any difficulty. . . ."

"My dear!—why should there be any difficulty! You've only got to *say*. . . . Well!—am I to tell Elizabeth Barclay, or am I not?"

Challis decided, and said. That is, he did not formulate special instructions, his words being merely, "Half-past, then. I'll be sure not to be later," and went straight away to get a bath. It is the greatest of luxuries, as we all know, after a journey, and Challis had made up his mind to have one the moment he detected a flavour of roasting, because that implied plenty of hot water in the bath-room.

Those who measure events only by the bounce they manifest—by their rapidity, or unexpectedness, or by the clamour that accompanies them—will wonder why any narrator of a story should think such flat incident worth recording. But observe!—it was the very flatness of this conversation that gave it its importance, coming as it did on the top of the exhilaration of Mr. Challis's visit, and his parting with that large and lively company of friends less than two hours ago. It has its place—this flatness has—in the lives of these two folk we write of, and really accelerates the story, although it is certainly slow in itself.

How very much Challis would have preferred it if his wife had said, "I won't kiss you if you swear," and had then done it *quandmême!* His mind—a fictionmonger's—reconstructed his re-

ception with things more palatable for Marianne to say, this one among them. Another thing he would have liked, quite inexplicably, was, "Well!—how's the fascinating Judith?" Possibly this was because he would have welcomed help from without to convince him he was indifferent about the young woman. The answer he imagined for himself, which would have been pleasant for him to give, was, "She's coming to see you next week, Polly Anne. So get your best bib and tucker ready!" But there had been none of this, nor the laughter—purely imaginary—that he garnished it with. Only the flatness as recorded.

"Perhaps it was all that confounded cabman," said Challis to himself and a bath-towel like a *toga,* after a very respectable warm bath—not equal to that at Royd, though—and a cold douche. He had to hurry up to keep his word at half-past eight. But he kept it.

"Well!" said he, as he joined his wife in the drawing-room, where she was awaiting the announcement of dinner, Challis conceived.

"Well what?" She touched the nearest bell-handle. "They'll know it's for dinner," she said, and the remark seemed relative. "Why well?"

"Well everything! Tell me all about the kids, about who's called, about where you've been, about everything. Come, Polly Anne, I think you might unbutton a little and be jolly when a chap's been away three weeks. How are John and Charlotte Eldridge?"

"Yes!—I think you might have asked about them. John has been at death's door. There's dinner! . . ." Challis made a sympathetic noise about Mr. Eldridge, but postponed inquiry. Nothing made it easy until he found himself a lonely soup-consumer; because, you see, Marianne wasn't hungry.

"What has it been?" Too concise, perhaps. But really death's door, with John on the step, had been the last thing mentioned.

"What has what been?"

"What you told me. What's been the matter with John?"

"Peritonitis. But he's going on well now. Dr. Kitt says he'll have to live very carefully for some time. . . . I know what you mean, but it's very unfeeling to laugh. Besides, I don't believe he eats more than other people." Challis felt indefensible. Just fancy!—there he was, eating gravy soup all by himself!

"I wasn't laughing, old girl," said he. "Poor Jack Eldridge! Peritonitis is no joke. I'll go round to-morrow."

"It won't be any use. He won't be able to see you. Yes—you

can take the soup, Harmood. Mr. Challis isn't going to have any more. . . ."

A mere rough sample of the conversation. It was not unlike others of the same sort on like occasions. But was Challis wrong in imagining that, this time, it was a little accentuated! Was it only his imagination, gathering suggestions from the atmosphere that his home had been that of self-denying endurance during his absence, and that his own selfish indulgences elsewhere were being actively forgiven for his sake? What had he done to deserve forgiveness? If he had known that he was incurring it, would he have committed the offence at all?

Also he did feel that Marianne hadn't played fair. What could have been more genial than her send-off, three weeks ago?—more apparently genuine than her refusal to accompany her husband to Royd on the ground of a real dislike for Society? To be sure, a throb of conscience reminded him of a certain breath of relief—almost—that he drew at the decisiveness of this refusal. Had Marianne been sharp enough to see it? His instinct told him that a woman might have a sharp department in her mind on points of this sort, and yet make a poor show in logic and mental philosophy.

The sense that he was a naughty boy that had been eating three-cornered jam-tarts, and giving no one else any, hung about him, and made him unlike himself. If only that abominable cabman had not spoiled the part he had sketched out for himself on his first arrival, one of exaggerated self-denunciation for his beastly selfishness, and tragi-comical commiseration for Marianne as Penelope or Andromeda! It would then have come so much easier to deliver that message from Judith Arkroyd. And now! Just look at *now!* Now, when he actually found himself fallen so low as to half-ask if he might smoke in the drawing-room! Not quite, of course; that would have been too absurd! But he said something or other, or Marianne would not have replied as she did.

"As if I ever minded! How can you be so ridiculous!" This was good and lubricative. But she spoilt it by adding that there was the little ash-pan. Nevertheless, by the time the incense from her husband's cigar, and an atmosphere of consolatory coffee, were bringing back the flavour of a thousand and one post-prandial hours of peace in days gone by, the malignant influence of that cabman began to lose its force, and there was concession in the way she added: "I suppose you weren't allowed to smoke in the drawing-room at Boyd's—Royd's—whatever it was?"

"Royd. Cigarettes—yes! Hardly cigars. At least, nobody did it. The young women smoked cigarettes."

"Those sort of people do it now. At least, Charlotte Eldridge says so. *I* don't know."

"Wish you'd smoke, Polly Anne! Have a cigarette now."

"Oh no!—I've tried often enough to know I don't like it. You must go away to some of your Grosvenor Squares if you're not happy smoking by yourself."

Things were pleasanter. Why couldn't Challis let it alone, instead of at once discerning an opportunity of delivering Judith's message? To say, as he did, "No—I've had enough of the Grosvenor Squares for some time to come," wasn't unblemished truth, but it was an excusable stepping-stone under the circumstances, with poor dear slow Polly Anne waiting for consolation. The mistake was in what followed. Our own belief is he would have done much better to make a forget of that message until his life was running again in a married channel. He began badly for one thing. You should never say "By-the-bye!" in order to introduce the thing uppermost in your mind.

"By-the-bye, Polly Anne, it won't do to forget that the young female Grosvenor Square wants to call on you." To this Marianne made no answer, and her husband had to add: "Miss Arkroyd—Judith!"

It became difficult not to answer. Marianne fidgeted. "I suppose she'll have to come," she said.

"Well!—I suppose so." There was a shade of asperity in this. But what followed softened it. "You know, really, Polly Anne darling, you'll have to put up with the fascinating Judith a little, for the sake of the play. Besides, she sent you such a very nice message."

"Very kind of her!" However, Mrs. Challis has quite her share of human inquisitiveness, and if she wants to hear the message after her sardonic speech, she must make concession. "What *was* the very nice message?" she asks grudgingly.

Perhaps Challis's powers of fiction made him able to imagine exactly how he would have behaved if Judith Arkroyd had been merely a showy, smart-set sort of a girl—or merely an intelligent young woman, without a figure to speak of—or, still more merely, one of those excruciating well-informed persons of importance phrenologically, but with no figure at all. On this occasion he felt he knew exactly what his conduct would have been had he undertaken an embassage from the merest of these three—the last. And he modelled his conduct accordingly.

"Don't be miffy with the poor woman, Polly Anne," said he. He had thought of "poor girl," but decided on something bonier,

with hair brushed on to the shape of the head, and a black dress. This refers, of course, to the provisional lay-figure he elected to give his message from.

"The poor woman!" Marianne repeated, looking rather suspicious over it. But the image of the lay-figure in his mind, telepathically communicated, produced a certain softening, so he thought. He moved from the bent wood rocking-chair he was smoking in to the sofa beside his wife.

"I'll tell you exactly her message word for word," he said. He did so, as from the lay-figure. And, indeed, he almost wished that fiction had been a reality, as far as this message went. He could have sketched out the proposed visit so much more easily, in his inmost mind; which was, to say truth, incredulous about its turning out satisfactory to either lady, their respective personalities being as supplied.

"I suppose she'll have to come," said Marianne drearily. "Why can't she come when other people are here?"

"Because she wants to see *you,* my dear. She doesn't want to see the other people."

"Why need I be in it at all? Can't you introduce her to Mr. Magnus, and let them settle it between them?" For in his last letter Challis had enlarged on the Aminta Torrington scheme, and his wife was quite *au fait* of the position so far.

He hummed and hawed, and flushed slightly. The removal of a column of ash from his cigar seemed to absorb him for a moment. "I don't think you quite see all the ins and outs of the situation, Polly Anne. Don't you understand? . . ."

"Understand what?"

"Well—I'm sure Miss Arkroyd really wishes to know you. You see, I've talked so much about you." This was not really a *true* truth, for conversation about Marianne had always been at Judith's instigation. "But there are other considerations, apart from that. . . ."

"What considerations?"

"Well, you know, we *do* live in a world! Don't we now, Polly Anne?"

"I thought it was something of that sort. Charlotte Eldridge said it would be."

"What did Charlotte Eldridge say? I wish she'd keep her tongue to herself. . . ."

"But you're getting angry before you know what she *did* say."

"No, I'm not! I mean I'm not getting angry at all. Why should I get angry? Come, old girl, be reasonable! What did

Charlotte Eldridge say?" Nevertheless, it is clear that Mr. Challis is keeping his temper—keeping it admirably, perhaps, but still, keeping it! His wife's answer shows painfully how well she is keeping hers.

"Charlotte Eldridge said I should be wanted the moment I told her about Aminta Torrington. . . . No!—it's no use pretending, Tite! . . . Besides, I'm *not* hurt. Why should I be? Only I don't see why there need be a make-believe friendship between me and this young lady—and me to have to put on my black silk, and a new Madeira cake—and to give Harmood directions to say not at home! Charlotte Eldridge and I have talked it all over. . . ."

"Oh!—you've talked it all over?" Challis either is, or pretends to be, inclined to laugh.

"Yes, we have. And you know how sensible Charlotte is about things of this sort. . . . No, Titus, you can try to make what I say ridiculous, and I dare say you'll succeed, but you know what a good friend Charlotte has been to me from the beginning. . . ." Marianne pulls up short suddenly in the middle of her speech, with a suggestion in it of a tear corked in at its source. She gets the cork well in, and ends with: "I won't say any more about it. You shall arrange it just as you like your own way"—but this with the amenability of a traction-engine making concession to its handle.

Challis, who had felt it rather hard that a tearfulness derived from tender memories of Mrs. Eldridge's loyalty in past years should slop over into his department, became awake to the fact that brisk strategy would be needed to prevent that cork coming out. "Come, I say now, Polly Anne!" said he with jovial remonstrance. "Fancy you and me falling out about a Grosvenor Square young lady!" He burst out laughing, roundly. "We *have* shot up in the world. My word!" He got his arm round an unresponsive invertebrate waist, in spite of a collision with a hook, which rather took the edge off his caress. Why cannot ladies have some sort of little smooth tie, just at that point, in case? It was a very slight blot on the scutcheon, however, and, indeed, would have counted for nothing with Challis had not Marianne offered him her mole to kiss instead of her lips. For she had a mole—a small one, certainly—just on the cheek-bone. Now a liberal, unreserved warmth in this act of the drama would have been invaluable. It would have helped Challis to snap his fingers at whatever it was that was taunting him with having effected for politic purposes a half-derision of Judith as a Grosvenor Squarian—and that, too, after the cordial message to his wife!

However, it was quite impossible to pretend—it would not be fair to say admit—that they were quarrelling, after that. In fact, it was so established an assumption that their old confidence was again on its old footing, that Challis felt it would be ungenerous to Marianne to change the subject for safety's sake. Besides, he wanted an answer to a question.

"You didn't tell me what it was Charlotte *did* say, Polly Anne. . . . I dare say she was all right, you know." The use of her Christian name alone was a concession—showed good-will. Speech is full of such niceties.

Marianne got up and broke a coal on the fire. She couldn't think of two things at once, naturally. This made a pause before answering, and a pretence of having omitted an answer because of the slightness of its subject was plausible.

"Oh—Charlotte? It really was the merest talk by the way. She only said it would keep people from talking nonsense."

"What would?"

"If the Grosvenor Square young lady and I were bosom friends. She was joking, you know."

"I see what she meant," said Challis; and seemed to, reflectively. But really he was crossing Mrs. Eldridge out of one or two passages in his good books where her name still occurred. Confound her! Couldn't she leave it to *him* to instruct Marianne—who was much too slow to find out anything for herself—on this point? However, it was best to confirm her, on the whole. He continued: "Of course, if it were thought that you and she were at daggers drawn, spiteful people would say things. They always do if they get a chance. But what I look at is that she *is* Aminta Torrington. It's quite miraculous. You never saw anything so happy." He quite forgot that lay-figure.

Marianne waived discussion of the dramatic aspect of the question. She knew nothing about these things—was an outsider. But she seemed to register concession on the main point. She supposed the young woman must come, and she could tell Charlotte and Maria Macculloch and Lewis Smithson to be sure not to call that day, and then Harmood could say "not at home." Better make it Thursday, and get it over.

"Didn't Charlotte say anything else?" This was chiefly conciliation on Challis's part. He did not wish to seem in a hurry to get away from Mrs. Eldridge, or to resent her discussion of his affairs.

"Oh—she *talked*, of course! You mean when I saw her yesterday? Only she was still so anxious about John."

"He'll be all right, won't he? Did you say peritonitis? Are you sure? Because peritonitis is the dooce's own delight."

"The doctor says there is no occasion for the slightest uneasiness." Whereupon Challis settled in his own mind that John Eldridge would be spared to his wife and relatives, for the present at any rate. Peritonitis inside a week, and no need for uneasiness at the end of it! He allowed the medical report to lapse, and referred again to what Charlotte had said. It certainly seemed, to judge by Marianne's reply, "I thought she was quite mistaken, you know," that Charlotte *had* "talked, of course," although she *was* so uneasy about John.

"What about?" But he didn't want to seem to catechize, so he discovered that his cigar—which he was quite half through—didn't draw well, and lit another. Then he was able to say, "Let's see!—what were we talking about? What Charlotte said." He resumed his place beside his wife, too manifestly to receive the answer for her to withhold it.

"It was only general conversation, about what Miss Arkroyd's family—with all their ideas—would think of her going on the stage."

"My dear! I must say I do wish you hadn't mentioned Miss Arkroyd to her at all. I hope you made her understand she must be quiet about it?"

"Oh, *she* won't mention it—except perhaps to John." Challis looked alarmed. However, John couldn't talk much at present, even if peritonitis only meant obstruction. "Besides, I didn't really tell her anything. It was an accident. I showed her something else in your letter a week ago, and by the merest chance she read it by mistake. It wasn't her fault."

"Nor yours. I see! But what did she read?"

"Only where you said you would have to talk to the old boy about his daughter's stage-mania . . . nothing that could possibly do any harm."

Now, Challis's conscience had been uneasy about the part he was going to play in helping Judith towards a secret arrangement which was sure to outrage the feelings of her family. So, when he said "Oh!" to this, he had to jump abruptly on to make it seem a casual, ordinary "Oh!" He succeeded pretty well. "What was Charlotte's idea?" said he.

"The same idea, of course. As long as Sir Thingummy knew all about it, no one could possibly blame *you*."

"I don't know that it's really my concern. I don't know that it's any of our . . ." A pause here is due to his duty to syn-

tax. . . . "I mean to say—that it is the business of any one of us. Miss Arkroyd is no chicken. In fact, I'm not sure that her age won't stand in her way—for training, I mean. However, of course I shall take care that her family knows all about it." Challis's voice sounded well in his own ears, and he was convinced that no fault could be found with his behaviour so far. As to anyone saying he should not have made the promise about Mr. Magnus of the Megatherium while he was a trusted guest at Royd, that was sheer nonsense. He felt quite nettled with Marianne for saying, "Oh, haven't you done it?" But he wasn't going to prolong discussion about it.

He felt nettled, too, with himself for feeling, when Marianne left him to read, before going to bed, the letters that had come for him—with a charge to him not to make a noise when he came up—nettled for feeling that he had got through the evening well, which was absurd; and that to do so he had assumed a certain roughness in reference to Judith, to accentuate his equable indifference to her personally, which was absurder. What was it all about?—was the question he asked himself. And then another that arose from it naturally, What was *what* all about? The distraction afforded by a handful of miscellaneous correspondence gave him an excuse for ignoring the latter question, which, indeed, seemed to him the more unanswerable of the two.

One thing, however, he was glad of having achieved. Marianne would write that letter, he felt sure. Only he would just keep his eye on her to see that she did it. He would not have to write to Judith, "Please don't come and see my wife!" in any form, transparent or otherwise.

For anything the story shows at this point, Alfred Challis and Marianne might have tided over any little difficulties arising out of the visit to Royd, if they had only been judiciously let alone. It was those blessed Peacemakers!

CHAPTER XI

VATTED RUM CORNER, AND CHESTNUTS. A YOUNG TURK. HOW LIZARANN TOLD MOTHER GROVES OF THE FLYING DUTCHMAN. OF AN AMBULANCE, AND WHAT WAS IN IT. HOW LIZARANN WENT HOME WITHOUT DADDY

LIZARANN COUPLAND used to wonder how ever Daddy could go out in the cold and stop all day. It was noble of him to do so in the public service—that was how Lizarann thought of it. For she believed the insinuations embodied in song by "the boys" in Tallack Street to be malicious falsehoods, and as for "the boy" whose aunt sold fried eels and winkles next door to the shop where her father purchased his shaving-soap, she only hoped that a good basting her own aunt wished to give to the whole clanjamfray of 'em—meaning boys generally—might be concentrated on the unsheltered person of this particular boy. She had improved her acquaintance with him, and had come to the conclusion that for presumption and self-conceit, for ill manners and very doubtful good feeling, that boy was without a parallel.

During the whole of this acquaintance it had never occurred to Lizarann to ask this boy's name. And but yesterday she had committed the tactical error of surrendering her own christened name in exchange for peppermint drops. The moment of the present writing is a deadly afternoon in January, gettin' on for four, but that dark you'll have to light the gas in the end, and may just as well do it at once. The place is the one spoken of in an earlier chapter as Vatted Rum Corner, and that boy is a settin' on the rilin' catin' of four 'ot chestnuts off of Mrs. Groves's bikin' trye, for a 'ape'ny, and to be allowed to warm your fingers at the grite. He had had to make room for other customers.

Lizarann came up cold, and envied the feast. The boy was a self-indulgent boy, or seemed so. For he only said, "These four's for me, bought and paid for, square. You git some for yourself, orf of Mother Groves. Two for a farden's *your* figger, Aloyzer." And then he sketched a clog-dance on the hard-trodden snow of the pavement, with a mouth quite full of chestnuts.

Lizarann felt the heartlessness of his attitude. Yesterday he had cajoled her into an admission that her name was Lizarann by of-

fering peppermint drops. *Now* he had nothing to gain by an offer of chestnuts, and kept them all himself! She happened to be in funds, and could have purchased four for a 'ape'ny, and in that case would as like as not have given that boy one, as an exemplar towards generosity. But at the moment a higher interest claimed her attention. He knew her name, and she didn't know his. An iniquity, clearly! How could she remedy it?

Now Lizarann had contrived, childwise, a curious idea about her name. It may have originated in a chant she herself had joined in frequently, merely for the sake of the music:

> "Oh fie—fie for shame!
> Everybody knows your name."

But it certainly had acquired its full force from an expression made use of by her Aunt Stingy, who had spoken of a young person as having "lost her good name." What the young person was called by her friends, afterwards, was a problem Lizarann had given a good deal of thought to. And she was now unable to dissociate the young person's position altogether from her own. If her name had not been lost as a necessary implement of social intercourse with the world at large, it at least had been surrendered with no *per contra*, in the case of an immoral and worthless member of it. But she felt that, could she become possessed of *his* name, as a set-off, the balance of righteousness would be adjusted. And she was much more anxious about this than about the chestnuts.

"What's your nime?" said she, after self-commune which suggested no less trenchant way of approaching the subject.

The boy paused in the clog-dance. "Moses," said he. And then went on as before.

"Nuffint elst no more than Moses?"

"That's tellin's." The boy said this absently, and did some more steps. Then he simulated a graceful subsidence of the dance, ending in an attitude that seemed to acknowledge the applause of a delighted throng. But a commercial possibility had presented itself. "What'll you stand," said he, "for to be told my name, and no lies?" This seemed mercenary; but then, had not Lizarann herself surrendered hers for a deal? Why condemn him?

No!—Lizarann lived in a glass house, and wouldn't throw stones. But she would make conditions. "Real nime all froo," she said. "Moses is lyin' stories!" For, you see, this was a crafty boy, and might consider the concession of a true surname alone would discharge his obligations under the contract.

"Then on'y Moses," said he; and began an encore—presumably, as it was the same dance. But he was not too preoccupied by it to take off the shell of his fourth chestnut, and when he had done so he smelt it, with disappointment. For it was mouldy. An idea struck him, and he acted on it.

"Marcy me, no!" said Mother Groves of the chestnuts when requested by him to 'and over a good un, fair and no cheating. "The riskis lies with the buyers. Where 'ud I be, in half the time, at that rate?"

"Then I'll 'ave the law of yer. Just see if I don't." He danced again, and this time his dance seemed to express confidence in his solicitor. But presently he stopped, and offered a composition. "You lookee here, Missis Groves," he said. "I'll 'and you back the mouldy one, onbit-into and closin' over the busted shell, acrost a clean new un, and I'll take another highp'orth off you, and pay square. If that ain't fair, nothin' ain't! But you got to look sharp, or the chance 'll be gone."

Mother Groves rejected the chance. "It ain't consideration enough to go again' the rules on, and me to take my 'ands out in the perishing cold. Make it a penn'orth and pick yourself, all exceptin' the three top."

"Hin't got no penny! Feel in my porket and see. It's open to yer to feel. There hin't no horbstickle. Here's a highp'ny and the bloomin' nut, shell and all. Mike your mind up!"

But Mrs. Groves's mind *was* made up, apparently. The boy then suggested that his motives had been the prosperity of trade, throughout; he was, in fact, or said he was, full up till dinner-time. So he must have been dining late, recently.

At this point Lizarann made a proposal. She, too, had a half-penny, and was ready to pool this halfpenny with the boy's, and give him sole enjoyment of the extra chestnut, but only on one condition. He must tell his name, and no lies.

Mrs. Groves brought her hands out in the perishing cold—pathetic old hands, a young girl's once—and made two even groups of four nuts each. Then, leave being giv', the boy chose the compensation nut; only he took his time like a young 'Eathen as he was. Then Mrs. Groves, as assessor and umpire, required his name as a preliminary to final liquidation.

"'Orkins. Frederick. Frederick 'Orkins. Could have told yer it wasn't Moses any day of the week! 'And over!" And thereon he and Lizarann each had four bloomin' nuts, so 'ot you couldn't 'ardly 'andle 'em.

"I shall keep mine for my daddy, and keep 'em 'ot too," said

Lizarann. She placed them nearest her heart, and felt that it was good to do so. They was a'most too 'ot, in the manner of speaking; but then a small undergarment protected her, when discreetly scroozled up fluffy.

"You best 'ide 'em well up," said Frederick Hawkins. "Here's a coarper comin' along. Don't you let 'em make no show, or he'll get his 'and on 'em."

But he only said this to perplex and annoy, and create unnecessary panic; and Lizarann knew that, every bit as well as we do. So she merely said: "Jimmy 'Acker can foight *you*," and enjoyed the warmth fearlessly. Her daddy's stick was not audible yet, coming along by the wall. He was late to-day. Lizarann's orders were to wait at the corner till she heard it, and then call "Pilot," that he might know she was waiting for him, and be happy. For he always had pangs of doubt that he might not meet her this time. Think of that little thing—for he knew how small she was still, by the feel, though there was no one to tell him what she was like to look at—think of her coming along that crowded street alone, to meet her daddy! She for her part had no misgivings about *his* coming. "Never you fear for me, lassie," he had said. And *he* knew, Law bless you!

"I'll Jimmy 'Acker *'im!*" said Frederick Hawkins boastfully. "I could 'tend on two like 'im at wunst. How old do you make him?" Which showed the vaingloriousness of his character, for clearly he knew nothing about Jimmy Hacker.

Lizarann couldn't commit herself to the age of the latter. But she could to his bulk and prowess. "He's thicker than you," she said, and added, with recollection of a combatant defeated by Jimmy Hacker: "He can foight a boy twelve next birthday."

"Then he ain't any so much to count on. I don't go by ages. Weights is what I go by. Any number o' stun I can foight, up to eight stun seven. You tell 'im to keep indoors, or I'll fetch him somethin' for to rek'lect me by. You see!"

But Mother Groves interposed to rebuke and check this inflated and defiant spirit. "Don't you pay no attention to that boy, my dear," said she to Lizarann. "He's that full of lip there's no placin' no reliance on a word he says. If I was his mother I should know just where he wanted a good canin'. Ah!—and he'd get it too, night or mornin'. A young cock-sparrer *I* call him, and if he don't come by a bad end it'll be a moral. Ah!—wait till I find out where your mother lives, and see." Mrs. Groves worked rising indignation into her speech, after the manner of her class. Even so the Choctaw or Cherokee stimulates himself to battle-point. But

Frederick Hawkins remained unmoved. He knew the old woman couldn't ketch holt upon him. He became most offensive, assuming a nasal drone with an approach to a chant.

"I got a widdered mother. She keeps a fish-shop. And I ain't a-goin', neither, for to tell you where." He threw a reminiscence of his previous dance into this.

Now Lizarann knew perfectly well that the fish-shop was next door to where her daddy bought his shaving-soap. But she wasn't going to tell. No nice little boy or girl ever tells. The particulars kept back on principle may relate to young cock-sparrows on whom no reliance can be placed, or to mere heathens—as in the present instance—but as for acquaintin' their parents, guardians, or other responsible grown-up persons, what they done, or anything likely to lead to conviction—who ever heard of such a thing? Even the London servant class retains this one trace of an honourable usage. It won't tell.

Mother Groves merely referred to the ease of discovering fish-shops; especially when localized, as this one practically was, by the constant presence round her corner of a heathen residing there. She then gave all her attention to the conservation of vital heat; and it was needed, for her poor old clothes were thin on her poor old body. It wasn't 'ardly a reg'lar bad day, not to call it so, but it was a frost that was going to give a lift to the plumbin' trade, and do a rare lot of good that way. For the only good that can come now to this world is evidently through the destruction of something it has worked at the making of in years past, in order that people who have little may have to pay people who have less to do a bit of repairs to it, so that it won't want no lookin' to again, not yet awhile.

Can we wonder?—we who have read, for instance, of the revived prosperity of ship-building, shown by the putting down on the stocks of several new . . . destroyers? But never mind this!—pardon it and get back to the story and the degrees of frost at Vatted Rum Corner.

It wasn't so bad then, not when once you was out in it; it had been a tidy sight worse two days ago, afore it froze so hard underfoot; why—the busses couldn't keep goin', and a 'orse fell down so soon as ever you got him on his feet! And as for cabs, they wouldn't set foot outside of the yard, because where was the use? You couldn't stiddy yourself on your feet, not unless there was cenders on the track, or thored with boiling water.

Lizarann bore it bravely, in spite of chilblains and a blue complexion. Frederick Hawkins was blue; but either his heathenism

or some other attribute enabled him to bear the cold defiantly. "It ain't freezin' here," said he, denying the obvious. "Hicey cold it was Bart'sey Park Sunday. The hice makes it cold 'acos of the skatin'." And Lizarann accepted this view of cause and effect. She might have disputed it had she not been beginning to feel uneasy about her daddy.

"Why, child, don't ye go along to'ards meetin' him? He'll be comin', I lay." Thus Mother Groves. And the boy added: "Why don't yer 'ook it along down to the Rilewye, to see for yourself? You 'ook it! 'Ook it orf! I'm tellin' of yer." But Lizarann only stood on her two feet alternately, and hugged the dying heat of the chestnuts. They wouldn't be no good for daddy. Alas!

"I was tolded not to do it," said she. "Yass!"

Mrs. Groves approved. "Quite right, my dear, not to disobey your parents. But your daddy he'll come, you'll see."

But Frederick Hawkins had another code of morals. "I'd disobey my parents if I had any to speak on. If I'd a dozen on 'em, I'd disobey the bilin'." Mrs. Groves pointed out that by doing this Frederick would be brought into collision with his Creator, and dwelt on the impolicy of such an action. But he continued obdurate.

"I'd disobey the kit on 'em. You'd see, if you kep' your eye open." Then, addressing Lizarann, he added: "You give me a chestnut, and *I'll* disobey your parents for yer. You jist try! See if I don't!" Then, when Lizarann timidly produced the chestnut, in great doubt of whether her action was justifiable, he added: "See if I ain't back again afore yer know where y' are," and, after a slight preliminary quick-step or double-shuffle, fled away into the growing dusk.

"You keep your sperrits up, child," said Mother Groves. And, as is usual when one hears that one's spirits want keeping up, Lizarann's went down. But she felt the old lady's goodwill, and went and stood close up to her, taking care to choose the side away from the roasting-box, lest she should seem simply seeking warmth. However, she was soon invited round to the other side. The warmth made her communicative.

"My daddy he's been to sea," she said. "Only in real ships, and come home again. The Flying Dutchman she *never* come home." This did not explain itself to Mrs. Groves. She drew a false inference.

"She went to the bottom, I lay. And all aboard of her belike. Lord be good to us!"

Lizarann shook her head. "Not the Dutchman. She's afloat,

every spar on her,"—she religiously gave Jim's exact words, with a sense of saying a lesson—"and to stop afloat till the Lord comes to judge sinners from repentance." She got a little confused here, but it sounded good, and her hearer was impressed.

"Now only 'ark at that!" said she. "I'd 'a said you was a God-fearin' child. And you may never need doubt but it's all true, my dear!" Mrs. Groves, perhaps, was prepared to ascribe truth to any narrative that had a religious phrase or two in it; still, she was probably impressed with the little person's manner, for she referred to Frederick Hawkins, in contrast. "Now, that young Turk, he's no respect, and won't come to no good end, I lay."

But Lizarann didn't want the conversation coaxed away from the Flying Dutchman. "Daddy *seen* her, himself," she said fervently; and then, resuming the lesson-manner: "Every stitch o' sail on her set in a three-quarter gale freshenin' from the south. And the look-out forward, he seen her too. And Job Collins, he seen her. And Marmaduke Flyn, he seen her. And Peter Cortright, he seen her." All these were essential items of the oft-told tale.

Mother Groves's hearing was none of the best; so when she condemned the time-honoured legend as outlandish and French, it may be she had really supposed that some of the expressions were in a foreign tongue, any variety of which she would naturally consider French, failing instruction to the contrary. But Lizarann's reference to the Lord, to sinners, and to repentance, was strong enough in itself to keep suspicions of Voltaire and Tom Paine in abeyance. Mrs. Groves therefore allowed the story to continue, and felt fortified against the heresies abounding on the Continent by the approved religious bias of the narrator.

"Peter Cortright and Marmaduke Flyn they was both on the mainyard reefin', alongside o' my daddy, and Job Collins he was aft by the binnacle. Then Peter Cortright he sings out to my daddy to look; and my daddy he looked and seen her, carryin' all sail afore the wind. And then, no more time than what you says budget in, she was agone away, out o' sight." A pause came here, for dramatic impressiveness. Then followed, for reinforcement of testimony: "But Job Collins, he seen her, too, plain!"

Mrs. Groves only said, "My sakes, now!—to think of that." But rather as a courtesy to the narrator. She would no doubt have followed her meaning better if thawed indoors before a nice warm fire. She certainly could not, or did not, admit to her mind a comparison that surely hung on the outskirts of the tale—a parallel between that moment on the great sea, and *now!* To

think of it all! Of the three reefers out on the yard, struggling with the mighty wind; of the rising seas whose crested foam it blew to spray; of its voice as it whistled through the drenched cordage, and made a whisper of the sailor's shout to his mate, that spoke of the ship he saw out yonder—the ship that, whatever she really was, was to become the Flying Dutchman in the memories of all the three! And then to think of what that child—that almost baby girl—told about her as she nestled, welcome enough, to the side of the old soul that had spent her last decade selling, in the London Streets, the chestnuts that had ripened in the southern sun, above the slopes the vines grew on. To think of the sordid and darkened lives, closed round in the intolerable hive of their own contriving, so stunted and suborned to a spurious contentment as never to long for an escape; so strange to the meaning of the word "rejoicing" as to find a version of it in the filth-house at the corner; whose swing-door, to say the truth, the little maid looks rather enviously at as it opens and closes, letting out the vapid bawlings from the human fools within into the silence of the streets, and suggesting jolly bad ale and new to the cold and empty passer-by! To think of the millions near at hand, all sunless beneath the great black pall that has for weeks past shrouded their visible world, but has left them unchoked as yet and confident, and even a little boastful—Heaven knows why!—of some strange indefinite advantages carbon and sulphur confer on those who can breathe them and live.

No two items of the parallels could be more unlike, surely, than the reefers out on the yard in the great sea wind, and such chance wayfarers as are to be seen now—few enough, for all who can keep indoors prefer to do so—making the best of their slippery way home, let us hope, to the native joint and vegetables and rice-pudding. Certainly—so one would have said—none more unlike than those of this approaching crowd, close on the heels of three policemen in charge of a wheeled ambulance, hand-driven, working slowly along the least slippery part of the road. And most unlike of all, surely, the human burden, sot or reprobate perhaps, that the closed curtain of the ambulance hides from us. But he would have been wrong who said so. For it was Jim himself that was inside that ambulance, and he ought by rights to have come along that road on his feet.

"You lie still, my good feller. The doctor he'll see to you." The policeman who says this to the interior of the ambulance says it as one to whom any form of poll-parrotting—that is to say, human speech—is distasteful. He slaps his gloves for warmth, as

he walks beside the ambulance. He is a reserve man, who has come out in charge of it. But a moment after he listens again; there may be exceptions, after all, to a rule of universal glum silence! What is this ambulance case saying?

"It ain't for myself, master. It's for my little lass. She comes for to fetch me home to the Green Man . . . house at the corner . . . very nigh to us now, as I take it. . . ." Jim's voice is bad, and he is speaking against pain, gallantly. A subordinate constable says, "That's so, too!" and this confirmation reinforces Jim, who goes on, recognizing the voice: "Your mate, he knows her. You'll tell her, master. I'll trust ye for a good man . . . there's only a little bit of harm done . . . say I've had worse happen many a time afore. . . ." But Jim is at the end of his tether. His voice goes faint. His instruction was clear, though.

"See for the child, Clancy," says the first officer. "And tell 'em at the bar to send out a small brandy." Clancy goes on ahead. He is a person incapable of feeling surprise, so when he meets a potboy approaching with a glass of brandy, he makes no useless inquiries, but merely points backward towards the approaching ambulance.

The potboy carries the brandy on, and the officer gets it down Jim's throat somehow. "Very smart of you, Thomas," says he, inventing a name for the potboy, a complete stranger to him. "Nothin' like being beforehand!"

But Thomas disclaims any credit for himself. His action was, he affirms, due to instructions transmitted to him by a young customer. His report is: "He cuts in and he says, says he, p'leece accident, he says. Pickford's waggon gone over a bloke, he says. You cut along out with a nip o' brandy for a stimilant, he says. That's what the orficer says, he says. And off he goes!" As the brandy is consumed, it clearly will be a good contribution to taciturnity to say nothing about it. Moreover, the potboy, miscalled Thomas, conveys that his governor, at the Man, is not a blooming screw; and that the brandy ain't worth going to law about. The officer suggests, however, that a second nip would not be unwelcome to himself, and would bring the total up to the point of being chargeable to the Force.

There is time for all this, as a case of this sort must be carried gently, apart from the fact that the slippery road makes caution necessary. And by the time the ambulance reaches the corner Lizarann is sticking to loyally, mindful to the last of her promise never to go beyond where it was wrote up "Old Vatted Rum," her first tendency to break into panic-stricken sobs, on hearing that her

daddy has had an accident, is already well under control; the policeman Clancy, whom she knows by sight, and has even spoken with, and who therefore is trustworthy, having told her that her daddy will soon come round, and never be a penny the worse.

"Now *you're* going to be a good little girl, ain't you, and not make a shine?" Thus the policeman, on vernacular lines, supposed to be soothing to the excitable. And Mother Groves, partly in deference to a uniform, adds: "You do like the gentleman tells you, my dear, and go along where he says!" This suggests to Clancy, who had at first intended to limit himself to negative injunctions, to say: "Yes, you run along home, little miss, and tell 'em your daddy's being took proper care of."

But the terrified scrap, blue with the cold, half-choked with the hysterical gasps she is fighting against so bravely, as bidden, sees a deadlier possibility still before her in her arrival at home without her daddy. It was the dread of having to tell, more than the fear of being accounted the responsible culprit, that kept her glued to the spot. She was docility itself towards constituted authorities of all sorts, but now her feet simply would not move. Oh, what a huge relief it was when the other policeman, him along of the hospital-barrer, said: "Ketch that kid, some of you, and bring her along this way! Can't wait here all day!" He slammed his hands one across the other very hard, not only to procure circulation, but to express promptitude.

The kid didn't want any bringing. She was across the road and beside the ambulance before the instruction to catch her could be obeyed. "You'll do your daddy more harm than good, that way!" said the hand-slapper, stopping short. Lizarann's first instinct, to scramble up the hospital-barrer—to get at her daddy on any terms—had to be combated on his behalf. "Peck the child up, and 'old her acrost the edge," suggests the potboy from "The Man." The constable remarks, "Some o' the public 'll be feeling dry by now, and nobody to serve 'em! You best carry that empty glass back, Thomas." But he accepts Thomas's suggestion, and Lizarann is grateful to the strong hands that pick her up to kiss her daddy's face. Was it really his?—she thinks to herself, as they put her down again out of her father's sight, below the couch-rim of the ambulance. She can't speak; he can.

"Ye never cried 'Pi-*lot*,' little lass." How hard he tried to make his voice cheerful, and how well he succeeded, too!—mere mass of breathless pain that he was. The least word a man can speak over whom a waggon has passed, crushing both legs, will show the constitution of a giant behind it, even if it is followed perforce by

a groan; and Jim suppressed even that. Were not those his little lass's lips that had just touched his cheek? She, poor child, could only say "Daddy!" or mix it with a sob. Which of the two Jim heard, who can say? But just at that moment the nip of brandy began to tell, and Jim was able to make a great effort. "Never you fret, little lass," he said. "The ship's doctor, he'll make a square job of my leg. You run away home and say I'm took proper care of." What Lizarann's daddy said was to be done was the thing to do, past doubt, and nothing else could be right. Lizarann started straight for home.

Poor Jim!—he knew what he was and where he was well enough. But he couldn't find his words right. So he talked of the ship's doctor, knowing all the while that the surgeon of the Z division was going to attend to his leg. As to the extent of his hurt and how it came about, he knew almost as little as the story does, so far. All he was sure of was that he lost his bearings after leaving his precious board at the barber's shop, was shouted at to stand clear, didn't stand clear, and was overwhelmed by what he should have stood clear of, and knocked silly. Beyond that, the little that had reached him, since he recovered consciousness, related so much to the prophetic certainty of its speakers that what had happened had been sure to happen, and they could have foreseen it any day, that it made him little the wiser. And what the crash had left of his faculties was too actively employed about his child to feel curious about the details of the accident.

Lizarann's first information about it, as she completed the legend of the Flying Dutchman to Mother Groves, was from the boy Hawkins, who came running to report the disaster, just as she was standing cross-examination on her first deposition. Instead of coming straight, he just in at one door of the ale 'us, and out at the other, like you might have said, only half a minute between! He then come crassin' over—this was Mrs. Groves's experience—and queer he looked, causing Lizarann to ask, "Ain't my daddy there?" in alarm. To which his reply was alarming and ambiguous: "Oh ah!—he's *there* all right enough—wot there is of him." He did not improve this by beginning, in a throat-clearing, gasping way, like a boy whose speech has lost its orientation, "I say, Missis . . ." Whereat Lizarann, in growing terror, broke into hysterical sobs, and would have started in her despair along the forbidden way, if the sad procession with the ambulance had not appeared, and chilled her to the marrow. She could hear the boy, greatly relieved by the appearance of direct evidence of what had

happened, saying that there was nothing to make a hollerin' about; it was only a haccident, and wot could you expect, a day like this? His anxiety to minimize the evil did credit to a human heart that seemed, in spite of appearances to the contrary, to underlie his Asiatic nature. He was even attempting further exhortation towards fortitude when the policeman came up, and he vanished.

In a very few minutes all were gone but Mother Groves and the chestnut stove, in the yellow gloom of the growing fog, waiting for the grandson of the former to come and see to the gettin' of 'em both home. As the old woman looked back on the event, it presented itself to her as an accident, and the accident had been took to the Hospital. That was all. On'y, that poor little thing! But Mrs. Groves soon forgot her, and was back on a great problem of her life—would the stove last out her time, with a bit of patching now and again? It had been that patched already, and was near falling to pieces. And when her grandson come, late, she'd a'most forgotten the accident. There now, she declared if she hadn't!

Lizarann pattered on as hard as she could go, so many steps to a sob, until she got to Dartley Street, and then she heard, behind her, the boy Frederick Hawkins, out of breath. "You ain't any call for to watercart, young un," said he. His manner was superior and offensive, but Lizarann felt that benevolent intention combined in it with masculine dignity. Still, protest was called for.

"I hin't a-cryin'!" she said. "On'y my d-daddy—he's t-took to the Hospital!" It was too dreadful, put into words, and Lizarann broke down over it.

"Who do yer call the worse by that? *He* ain't, not he!" This boy means well. His better nature is roused, but he has no mode of speech that is not truculent or threatening. He softens a little, though, as he becomes communicative. "Why, I had two uncles and a aunt, flat they was, under a street-roller! And they just off with 'em to the Horspital, and, my eyes and witals!—you should a' seen 'em no better than a fortnit after! Singin' they wos!"

Lizarann disbelieved this story, but not because of the main incident. It was the singing that stuck in the gizzard of her credulity. Uncles and aunts never sang. They might be raised from the dead; may not Lazarus have had a niece? But *singing!* —no! She merely summarized her views, not arguing the point: "They never sang nuffint."

A proud spirit brooks no contradiction. "Ain't I tellin' of yer?" said the Turk indignantly. He adduced corroborative evi-

dence. "Why!—warn't a boy-makes-his-livin'-by-daily-journals-I-knows's father's corpse h'isted up out of a shore and took to the Horspital stone-dead with the un'olesome atmosphere and fetched to? And dined off of nourishin' food the same evening, and rezoomed work on the Monday?" Meeting no expression of doubt of this case, he adduced another, more calmly. "Likewise Tom Scott, as 'arf killed Parker for five pounds a side, he picked up six of his teeth he'd knocked out, he did; and he run after him to the Horspital, he did; and they stuck 'em in again for Mr. Parker, they did, as good as new. They can do most *anythin'*." So it appeared. And the cases gained greatly in credibility by the Turk's obviously true recitation of maturer ideas than his own in the language of seniors. It was like Lizarann's own tale of the Flying Dutchman; and she felt it so, and found solace accordingly. She hoped the Turk would go all the way with her, to give moral support, and repeat his experience. You see, this Turk was, to her vision, big, authoritative, and mature. He did not present himself to her as an impident young sprat, in want of local smacking. Which no doubt would have been Mrs. Steptoe's view of him had he come all the way. But he forsook Lizarann at the top of Tallack Street, leaving her grateful to him, all the more for his narration of how he heard the blooming copper say a nip o' brandy wouldn't be amiss as a stimilant, and he told 'em at the Green Man. He added that he expected to be proarsecuted for telling of 'em—recalling a little the saying of the third Napoleon, that the Human Race always crucifies its Messiahs.

So there stands Lizarann trembling on the doorstep, after jumping up to the knocker to strike it back and leave it to execute a single knock by itself, and watching the great white flakes of snow that are beginning to fall at their leisure—no hurry—plenty of time yet for three inches deep of them and their mates before the milk comes in the morning!

CHAPTER XII

HOW UNCLE BOB HAD THE HORRORS. HOW LIZARANN ATE COLD CHESTNUTS IN BED. DELIRIUM TREMENS. HOW JIM COULD SEE AT NIGHT, AND WAS UNDER THE BED. POLICE!

LIZARANN could not shut her eyes to the difference between Aunt Stingy, as she anticipated her on the doorstep, and the Police Force, according to her last impression of it. Her aunt's was not a bosom she could fly to for solace in her trouble—well! no more was that of the Force, if you insist on literalness up to the hilt; but metaphorically she would far sooner have had recourse to the latter than the former. She did not, however, expect penalties this time if she could get in her explanation; but she had doubts whether the shortness of her aunt's temper would allow of its development at sufficient length to be understood.

She tried to think of some quick thing to say that would at once reveal her daddy's mishap and the cause of her return without him. But she should have done it before that sepulchral single knock had shown the executive power of the knocker, and brought out by contrast the footless, hoofless, wheelless silence of Tallack Street. Now that its summons to open had been delivered, the poor little shivering author of it could think of nothing at all. She might have done so, though, as far as time went, for she had to repeat her knock after a pause her terror made to seem short; while to her eagerness for any human voice—even Uncle Bob's—it seemed awfully long. But, as it turned out, the best she could have thought of would have been of little use.

The second knock brought about a shuffling in the house that fluctuated a moment, threatened to subside as it had begun, then seemed to decide on action, and approached the door—but heavily, being palpably Uncle Bob, whose mission seemed to be considered complete by the household when he had stood the door on the jar, and left it, without waiting to see who had knocked. Of course, it could only have been Jim and the child. So it looked as if Mr. Steptoe had decided that his duty was discharged by removing obstacles to their entry, and leaving them to close the door their own way. He'd stood the candle down and just left it to gutter in the

passage, when Lizarann got inside of the house. There was something gone wrong there, too, evidently.

As her uncle was in the habit of using the adjectives popular in his class rather freely, Lizarann was not surprised when, supposing himself to be addressing her father, and asking him to "shet to that door and keep the cold out of the house," he prefixed one open to many objections to each of his three substantives. But she was surprised at the tone of his voice, which chattered in gusts, as though control over it went and came, and at the way he was crouching over the fire. He had spoken to her father as Jim, and evidently was taking him for granted—had grasped no facts.

"Please, where's Aunt Stingy?" The child could think of no better thing to say. Something was altogether too wrong with her uncle. She could see he was shaking. All things were all wrong clearly, and the world a nightmare!

"In her bed, mayhap!—shamming ill, I take it." Then he raised his voice, but never looked round: "Jim!—why can't you shut up that da-da-damned d-d-door and come inside?" He had a fair convulsion over those words, more like the chattering fit that sometimes comes before a bad attack of sea-sickness than the effects of ordinary cold. Many may not know this sort.

"Father ain't here," was all Lizarann could say.

"Then shet to the damned door till he comes." He could say this and never look round, or notice the sob-broken voice, all a-strain with its terrors, of the little speaker. If he had only cursed her for crying, it would have sounded sane by comparison. Lizarann wished herself back in the street, with the Turk. And how happy those few minutes seemed now, when she did not know about daddy, and was telling Mother Groves about the Flying Dutchman!

She could only stand speechless and utterly terrified at the oddity of her uncle's manner—she well knew his ordinary one, of being in the liquor he was never out of—and was just on the point of mere mad screaming or starting to run God knows where, when the voice of Aunt Stingy came from her bedroom above, also with alarm in it. "Jim, can't you hear, you fool? Leave him to himself, I tell you. He's had the horrors." Aunt Stingy seemed to imply that the horrors, whatever they were, would subside of themselves.

Ill has a fixed point in the minds of young children—a simple maximum it reaches and never goes beyond. Lucky for them that it is so! For a step further would kill. Lizarann's mind could be dragged no farther along the road of terrors that leads maturer

lives to self-slaughter or the madhouse. Or it may be some pitying angel wrapped her small soul in a merciful stupefaction, that it might live. For when her aunt's voice came again, peevish and impatient, but without sense of any very abnormal conditions, she was able to answer, "Yass, Aunt Stingy," but not very audibly.

"Why can't you answer when I speak? I tell you, let him bide. He's best to himself, and he's had all what liquor there was. . . . Can't you answer? . . . Fetchin' me down! . . ."

The child understood her aunt's context, for all its elisions. To propitiate, she ran upstairs. A descent in wrath, portended by an exaggerated foot-tramp, was averted by her words: "D-daddy ain't come b-back—he ain't!"

"Why couldn't you speak?—little hussy! *You're* a child to have in a house. When's he coming?"

"He *ain't coming!* Yass—he *ain't!* He's took to the doctor on a barrer. Yass—he *is!*" And Lizarann, whose small hands, cold and blue, are all tremor and visible unrest from panic, would like to run, but dares not. She has worded her awful message, though. That is something, however much Aunt Stingy may doubt its truth.

"Who's to know you ain't lying? Who's to know he ain't in at the Robin Hood? Now, if you're story-tellin' . . .!" A bony warning finger should have been enough without any further details of the penalties of falsehood. A reference to a flagellum that had once been inherent in a discarded pair of the speaker's stays—an incredible wooden lathe—ought to have been quite superfluous. But Mrs. Steptoe had had great trials, to excuse her short temper.

However, nothing can alter the facts; and Lizarann can only repeat her statement. Daddy had been took away on the p'leece barrer, with curtings; and his leg was hurt. But the doctor was at the Horspital. This was felt, and offered, as a palliative. Surely it deserved better recognition than, "And why couldn't the child tell me all this before? Keeping me standin' here!" very wrathfully fired off at poor Lizarann. She *had* told it, and at the earliest possible moment. What could she do more?

Aunt Stingy's reception of the story, which was less *émotionné* than Lizarann had expected, had its good side. Perhaps the presumptuous boy's description of the powers of Hospitals was not all fanciful, and her aunt's wider experience knew that in a short time daddy would be back home again; not only well and sound, but even better and sounder. Lizarann extracted consolation from her aunt's half callous hearing of her news, without closely analyzing it. Probably Mrs. Steptoe would have been more sym-

pathetic if her own cup of bitterness, like her small niece's, had not been full to the brim already. But sympathy would have intensified Lizarann's solicitude about her father; the fact that the news could be apathetically received by anyone, even Aunt Stingy, fortified her. It may even be that she was braced by her own keen feeling of the injustice her aunt did her in apparently ascribing her father's disaster to her, when really she was only the innocent and most unwilling bearer of the news of it. That, however, was Mrs. Steptoe's attitude. "There's a many'd 'a said you didn't deserve no supper," said she, and claimed a weak good-nature as a quality of her own. She hustled Lizarann into her father's bedroom, with needless collateral pushes in wrong directions, and the admonition, "Don't let me catch you in the parlour, or you'll know of it. Starin' round!" Her truculence, no doubt, had something of a safety-valve character, and she may have thought that the youth of its object would remain ignorant of its full stress, while she herself had the whole advantage of the relief it gave. But really the child understood more than she ascribed to her, and felt its injustice, tempered by the broad consideration that it was only Aunt Stingy.

Mere ferocity towards children is bad enough, but it is hardest to bear when it is illogical. Aunt Stingy was inconsecutive in her grounds of indictment against Lizarann, and this added to the sting of her injustice. No child would have been readier than she to see to her own supper, and hot up half a bloater on the bit of fire that had looked so cheerful in the front room—though she couldn't above half see it for Uncle Bob gettin' in the way—or to stoast a slice of bread afore the bars with a fair allowance of butter on; or to do what she dared not ask her aunt to do, and lie the four chestnuts, which she still treasured mechanically inside her frock, on the top bar where it was flat, to get the heat back in 'em a bit, before cracking off the shell. So it was inconsistent and absurd in her aunt, after telling her to keep where she was or she would let her know, to return presently with all the supper she would get to-night, comin' in so late, and to add: "*I* wasn't waited on when I was a little girl. Standin' round, expectin' your elders to fetch and carry!" quite ignoring the fact that she herself had paralyzed her niece's activity by instructions not to go outside of that room until she was told to it. And equally so when, without any evidence that the child was going to say a word, she added: "Now, don't you answer me, for that I cannot abide; but just you eat your supper and go to bed, or we shall have *you* ill next." Of course, it was only when Jim was out of the way that Mrs. Steptoe

allowed the shortness of her temper to get the better of her so completely, and on this occasion everything was against elasticity.

Things were all so nightmare-like that nothing could well make them worse, or Lizarann might have been additionally terrified and oppressed when her aunt, before consigning her supper finally to her for consumption, looked it all over closely and said, more to herself than the public: "*I* don't see any things a-crawling." As it was, in the Valley of Shadows Life was passing through to-night, Lizarann merely said: "There ain't nuffint on the stoast," and began her supper off it sadly. Her daddy's great effort to speak against his pain, and his reassuring words about the doctor, had made that cheerless evening meal a possibility to his little lass. Full knowledge, and a year or so more of life, would have meant inability to eat. But Lizarann was very young, and, moreover, could not credit a possibility of mistake to her daddy. Had he not spoken confidently of the "ship's doctor" making a square job of his leg? She had certainly a slight misgiving that this pointed to his leg assuming a different shape after the operation. All sorts of contingencies hung about Hospitals. You never could tell what grown people wouldn't be at next. But whatever the outcome was, daddy would be *there*. And this black cloud would roll away.

Aunt Stingy retired, and left Lizarann to herself and her supper with a final imputation of rebelliousness and disobedience that was quite groundless—so its object thought. "*You* do like I tell you, and go straight to bed when you've e't your supper. Burnin' the candle-ends for nothing!" She then did violence to the understanding, by adding: "The light won't last you out, except you look sharp; and then you'll be in the dark." If a rigid economy was compulsory, how could extravagance be possible? But menace without method was Aunt Stingy's attitude to-night.

Lizarann, left alone, looked all round the tray and under the milk-jug, but could see nothing crawling. She was not so much concerned with the avoiding such things as articles of diet as a County Family would have been, or even the Upper Middle Class; her object was to throw light on her aunt's soliloquy, which she had not ventured to ask the meaning of. Getting no light, she ate the scrop o' bloater, and the stoast and butter, and drank the milk, and did very well, for her aunt was not christened Stingy from any tendency to cut down rations unduly. Only she would have done better still, had she been able to sob less, and if the resources of a pocket-handkerchief ten inches square had not required supplementing by sleeves, which can only be crudely engineered against tear-drops, or their reincarnations. But she got through

her supper before ever the candle set alight to the paper, and flared. Then she got to bed before the flare became convulsive; not to be left in the dark with—who knows?—a nightgowned sleeve inside out and no finding where. Because we all feel that spectres are not to be trusted, unless you have something on. Indeed, timid persons are not happy till the whole thickness of the bedclothes is between them and possibly convincing phenomena.

The candle died hard. But Lizarann knew that the longer it took, the less it would taint the atmosphere after its last convulsion, and left it to smoke in peace. So she watched it from her bed that stood in what was little more than a cupboard off the room her father slept in, and cried to think that his was empty. She watched, and wondered which would come first, the last flicker, or her last mouthful of chestnut. For she ate those chestnuts cold, and shoved the shells well under the bolster so Aunt Stingy shouldn't see. She was a very human little girl, was Lizarann, for all she was so devoted to her daddy.

The candle outlived the last chestnut. Then consideration had to be given to the problem how to get to sleep afore the nasty smell come along the ceiling and down. Once asleep, you can ignore smells, even when sut. Sut is the worst, but candlegutter has a nasty flaviour with it. So Lizarann did wisely to go to sleep vigorously.

She was succeeding, and beginning to dream a nice dream, though she wasn't getting warm yet, when her aunt made a tempersome re-entry on the scene. Lizarann woke with a start, and, remembering all the dreadful reality, broke out crying—she couldn't help it! Shaken by one arm, and told to wake up and have done with that petering noise, she recovered self-possession, except for a lagging sob at intervals, and sat up. Directed, inconsecutively, to lie down and go to sleep again, and no more nonsense, she was preparing to comply when her aunt gave a first beginning of a screech and stopped it short.

"Whatever is it? . . . O Lard! . . ."

"It's a ch-chestnut sell. I eated it." Confession proved good policy in this case, averting inquiry which would have revealed the hidden store under the bolster.

"O Lard, what a turn it gave me! . . . he's made me as bad as himself. . . ." The woman had a frantic look about her; her husband's horrors evidently had a sort of infection for her; though of course the child had little insight into this. "You bad child, you! You little good-for-nothing slut, lyin' in bed eating chestnuts, and your father in the Hospital!"

This wounded Lizarann to the quick, and righteous indignation overcame both grief and fear. "I *ain't,*" she shouted, and for the moment quite forgot that she *was,* or at least *had been,* the moment before.

"Don't you tell me that, you ontruthful child, and your leavings staring you in the face! Now just you tell no more stories, but say where they've took your father, and what he's done to himself."

This retrospective use of a conviction for untruth—and a morally unjust one—to suggest a course of antecedent misrepresentation on her part, seemed to Lizarann quite the worst piece of mendacity within her experience. But it got the conversation still further away from that nutshell deposit; and that was good, so far. "Father *said* he'd be took proper care on, and I_w-wasn't to c-cry, and I shan't!"

"*Can't* you tell me where they've took your father *to,* instead of vexin' me? Is he gone to the Station, or the Hospital?"

"The Spoleece, they carried him off to the Sospital. Yass!" Then, sitting up in bed, a small monument of woe, for the moment tearless, Lizarann considered whether she had grounds for deciding which Hospital. She knew of three, the Smallporks, Guys's, and Bartholomew's, but she was very uncertain about the two last. She decided on denying the Smallporks, if asked. However, her aunt accepted *the* Hospital as sufficient. Let it go at that!

"What did your daddy say he'd done to his leg? Now, no makin' up! Say the truth, like he told you." This would have been a signal to many children to strain hard to invent the truth out of their own heads. Goaded by stupid, unsympathetic people, they do this in self-defence. But Lizarann was honourable and clear-headed.

"He only saided his leg—didn't say nuffint about it. Only the sip's doctor would make a square job of it. Yass!"

"And what good's your schoolin' done you? Couldn't you have the sense to ask and find? What ever do you suppose God gave you your tongue for?—to set with your mouth wide open? Little plagues can talk fast enough when they ain't wanted to it!" She then suggested, most unfairly, that Lizarann was detaining her by holding out false hopes of information. "*I* should like to know how long you expect me to stand here askin' questions. This time o' night! And me wanted to look after your uncle! *Get* down into your bed and ha' done with it! *I* can't waste *my* time talkin' to you." After which she departed and locked the door; Lizarann

could not imagine why. But there was something very queer with Uncle Bob, who had been audible all the time in fitful outbreaks, conveying a sense of his adjective applied as a stigma to many things, and as a refreshing emphasis to parts of speech.

Lizarann's last impression—a hazy one, before deep sleep came, and total oblivion—was that her aunt went out from the house, leaving the street door on the jar, and that then she heard the voice of their neighbour Mrs. Hacker, saying, "He'll be all right by morning."

Now this little maiden attached only two ideas to this husband of her aunt: one, that he was a painful concomitant of all their lives, who had to be put up with, and where was the use of complainin'?—the other that he was the victim of a liver-disorder known as "the boil." His absorption of gin was part of himself; a practice as much identified with him as any inherent quality or fixed condition; perhaps the celibacy of a priesthood presents a sort of parallel case. So all new and strange developments in Uncle Bob were credited to this disorder, and when Mrs. Hacker from over the way said the patient would be all right by morning, the only suggestion to Lizarann's drowsy mind was that there was a bottle of doctor's stuff never been took, and that it had just come in handy. For—but perhaps you know this?—the masses, *par excellence,* account all drugs good for all diseases, if took reg'lar. The classes, prone to affectation, get prescriptions made up each time.

So the child was soon sound asleep and happy.

But the cobbler's disorder was the first beginning of the end of a long devotion to gin, and, to speak scientifically—always do so when you can!—he was in a very advanced condition of Alcoholism. But he was very unlike the priest, who, in the most advanced conditions of celibacy, passes his life—poor fellow!—in secret longing for the remedy. For Mr. Steptoe hugged his Alcoholism, caressed it, and fed it constantly with new supplies of raw gin. His affection for the cause of his disease was self-supporting, and he longed for small goes of it as keenly as the priest longs for the proper antidotes of his—for Home and Love.

When Aunt Stingy took such pains to lock her niece into the bedroom she might just as well have locked her husband into the front parlour. But she was deceived by appearances. For it was just—only just—untrue that he had had all the liquor there was. There was a short half-glass in the bottom of an unnoticed bottle, put by to be took back, and a penny on it. On this Steptoe greedily pounced, during his wife's first interview with the child in the next

room. It produced that momentary flash that is so misleading in these cases, when actual improvement seems to follow a new stimulus. Often the trembling hand and idiot brain resume skill and coherency, for the moment, only to fall still lower at the next reaction. The woman felt secure in her husband's assurance that he was a blooming sight better, and that he couldn't tell what the described Hell had been the described matter with him. He promised to come to bed as soon as the fire giv' out; and she left him, free from the horrors for the time being, standing with his back agin' the mantelshelf, collecting the last heat with a view to sitting on it—the heat, not the mantleshelf—while he finished through his pipe.

She ought not to have done it. Or she ought to have took the key out of the outside of the bedroom door, or hid it anywheres handy—where *he* would never have looked for it, Law bless you! Instead, she went to bed herself, and probably fell asleep as soon as a sense of her husband moving, downstairs, seemed to warrant a belief that he was going to keep his word. She slept sound, and it may have been two hours past midnight when she was waked by a movement below, and found that her husband had never come to bed; was still smoking, probably. But this was not her first thought as, having lighted her candle, she sat up in bed, noting the sounds that followed. Her spoken reflection was: "If that's Eizarann prancing about, I'll let her know to-morrow." Then she remembered the key, and couldn't understand the position. And then took advantage of a silence to decide that it wasn't anything. When an "anything" may involve our having to get out of bed in the cold, we are apt to decide on its non-existence. She blew out the candle and lay down again.

This is not a medical work, and it is no part of its business to locate exactly the case of Robert Steptoe in medical records. The discrimination of the symptoms of *delirium tremens* proper, and their points of difference from those of ordinary delirium—nervous or feverish—are matters of great interest, especially in their relation to treatment, but they belong elsewhere. Our function is limited to recording the symptoms of the case as they have been brought to our knowledge; and we must hope that our medical readers will allow a certain latitude to the description of the only instance of the malady that has come within its writer's experience. Some of it is necessarily conjectural, but nothing would be gained by a laborious effort to separate these portions from the certainties. For instance, the patient's hours in the room alone, after his wife

left him, must be matter of surmise. But surmise to the following effect appears well grounded.

So long as the effect continued of the small dose of stimulant he had discovered, he remained sane and free from immediate delusion, and had no other intentions than to smoke through his pipe and follow his wife to bed, as promised. But after he had finished it, and knocked the ashes out—they were found on the hob, and the pipe stuck in the looking-glass frame, when the ground was gone over afterwards—his attention was arrested by something crawling over the table. He had seen one before (as appears by our narrative), in fact, he had seen several, causing a sympathetic horror in Aunt Stingy. He tried to destroy this one, but nothing came of the attempt. Putting a volume on it and crushing it down only caused it to come through the book and crawl over it. He tried this frequently, wondering at the result, but not specially alarmed—more amused perhaps in a kind of vacuous way—until he saw another, and then another. The place was all over them, and he called them names—some very inappropriate—and qualified them all with his favourite adjective. In themselves they really did not matter. But most unfortunately the fact that they were all going in the same direction showed him that they were emanations from a man of the name of Preedy, a leather-seller, of whom he used to purchase ready-closed uppers and cuttings. It was shrewd of him, he thought, to identify Preedy as their original source by the steady way in which they all kept going in one direction. And still shrewder to infer that it was all part of a scheme to oust him from the sort of little kennel or box in which he carried on his trade in a street half a mile off. It was left locked at night; but, seen by the light of these vermin, and a buzzing noise that accompanied them, what was to prevent Preedy getting possession of it and bribing the police on duty to support him in his usurpation? He sat down for a minute or two longer to think this out. The room was always well lighted, because the street gas-lamp, just outside, always showed through the clear space above the shutter.

Reflection did not even suggest that it might be a mistake about Mr. Preedy. If it had, his condition would not have been delirious. On the contrary, it all became clearer to him than ever. If it were not true, how came he to have read half-an-hour since full particulars of it under the heading "Late Entries" in the sporting journal that was still lying on the table? He could find it again in a minute, only it was so dark. He had a match and lit it, to read by; but his hand shook so—always along of that (described) Preedy—that he couldn't master the (described) small type. And

his wife had got the candle away. Just like her!—she done it a-purpose. But he knew there was a candle in Jim's bedroom, next door.

The noise he made fumbling at the door, which was of course locked, waked Lizarann, who, having fallen asleep on the fact that her aunt had locked her in, knew that fact and no other as her senses returned. She called drowsily, "You locked the key that side," conceiving the disturber to be her aunt. Contrary to what might have been expected, her uncle understood clearly, and opened the door. But the reason he felt no surprise at the key having been turned outside was one of the indescribables of delirium. It was, somehow, because Lizarann answered instead of Jim. Of course—so it seemed to him—if Jim had answered, it would have been inside. You think that too strange? Try delirium, and see!

His wife had had nothing to gain by telling him of Jim's accident, and his faculties had not been at observation-point. Or, perhaps, he might be said to have forgotten that he had never known that Jim didn't come in to supper. Anyway, he accepted Jim as having gone to bed, and made a sort of apology for disturbing him.

"Ashkpardon mashcandlestick," said he, in two husky words, consisting of matter thrown loosely together, and added, as a single thought that might help, "Looshfermash." He had no idea about time—thought his wife had left him a few minutes since.

Lizarann was not frightened. She did not understand that Uncle Bob imagined her daddy was in his bed as usual; and there was nothing unusual in his coming to look for a lucifer-match. She called out to him without moving: "On the mankle-shelf, Uncle Bob." But she was only half awake. She dimly heard him feeling about the room for the candlestick, and muttering to himself. Sporadic examples of his favourite adjective made outcrops in his monologue, becoming more and more frequent as he failed to discover the object of his search. Still, Lizarann thought herself at liberty to remain half-asleep, if she chose.

Not being sure how far she had done so—she might, indeed, have been wholly asleep without knowing it—she could not have said how long this continued. She was roused in the end by the delirious man suddenly exclaiming, in a voice of terror that filled her, too, with terror: "My Goard, then, he *has* only one!" He then broke out in incoherent fear: "You keep him off of me, master—you keep him off. Or I tell yer, I'll brind him—I *will!*" At which Lizarann's heart stopped. Not from anything in the words, which were of the sort that she would have told Bridgetticks were "only Uncle

Bob." Uncle Bob occurred too frequently in daily life for her to fret much about his language. The cold shiver had run down her back, this time, because she knew there was no one in the room with him. But, may she not have known falsely? Surely there was someone else there, that he was speaking to. Listen!

"Good job you come in, master! You're a good chap, you are. You're Bonyparty, I take it, in the picter-book. You larn him to keep his distance, and I'm your friend. Won't you take nothing? Just a drain? . . ." He wandered on, with a thickness of speech that, if spelt ever so successfully, would only encumber the text.

Uncle Bob had gone mad, clearly, and would get himself took to the Asylum, where Bridgetticks's Aunt Tabither was. Bridget was very proud of this aunt. And though there might, as in her case, be advantages in the end, the present had to be faced. And poor Lizarann was the only soul that knew anything about it, and was stiff with terror in bed, in the dark, with a speechless tongue, but a calm interior spot somewhere, that was wondering when she would begin to cry out in her agony of fear, yet knew that daddy wasn't there to cry to.

In a few moments she was aware that the breath of the delirious man was catching again, as in terror, and his voice followed: "He ain't gone—he ain't gone! Don't you pay no attention to 'em, master! I can see his eye under the bed, spinning round like a wheel. If there'd a been two of 'em now. . . ." Then in a sudden extremity of terror his voice was worse than if it had been a scream; he forced it from his lungs in a strained whisper. "My Goard!—he's a-coming. He's a-coming on. He'll get me afore he's done, he will. . . . Leave hold of me! Leave hold, you . . ." We have to stop short.

Lizarann's impression was that he then struck out to protect himself against his imaginary aggressor. He certainly fell, and was stunned. The child grasped this, and the fact that he was now harmless for the moment. But she was so dumbstricken that it was perhaps the whole of three or four minutes before she could find her voice, and then only for inarticulate hysterical screams.

The fall of Steptoe on the floor was the sound that waked his wife in the room above. The silence that followed was almost long enough to convince her of the safety of going to sleep again. But Lizarann's cries of heartfelt terror and entire panic came to stop that. The woman jumped up and lit her candle, whose wick had smouldered to the grease the last time it was blown out; it had to be coaxed, and a libation of melted paraffin had to be poured off it before it would flare up steady-like, so you could carry it and not

spill. It taxed Mrs. Steptoe's nerves to negotiate all this, with that tryin' child making that noise downstairs. But it was either that or go down in the dark. We borrow her own phraseology. Besides, Lizarann had had nightmare and woke everybody, that time Jim gave Bob such a remindin', three months ago. So her aunt made her light secure before going below.

Her expectation was to find her husband in a stupid drunken sleep in the front parlour, and the door of the back room closed as she had left it. She saw the open door and quickened her pace.

"What's that child been after outside of the room? *I'll* soon know about that. . . ." She soon knew all that could be known at the moment—that her husband, whom she nearly tumbled over, was insensible on the ground—or half-insensible, muttering—and that Lizarann was vociferous with terror in bed, and quite incapable, so far, of telling anything. Her first instinct was fault-finding, as against the child for screaming. "*Stop* your noise or I'll make you . . . Lizarann! . . . do you *hear*? . . . *Will* you stop?" And then in a voice of vengeful resolution: "*I'll* be in after you directly." Whereupon Lizarann choked her screams back and waited.

Her aunt was examining Uncle Bob for bruises, so she thought; and he appeared to be resenting the inquiry. Suddenly he recovered his articulation in a wonderful way, and became quite unreasonably angry.

"You'll keep your hands off me, or I'll smack your chops for you." He gathered himself up and got on his legs, but swayed a little as he stood. "What's that you're a-sayin'? Why the (described) Hell can't you speak up? *Your* tongue's fast enough when nobody's asked you for it. Look you here, Pry-scilla Coupland, I ain't going to be minced about no more, for nobody." Lizarann knew from his calling his wife by her maiden name that her uncle's state was a dangerous one. He did it whenever he became savage with drink. What followed was no improvement. "Ah!—you may go and tell Jim if you like. He's in it, like the rest on 'em. I know all about their planning and scheming. I'll make my affidavit afore a lawyer. First thing to-morrow morning, and make an end of it all. I *will!*" His manner had such serious conviction in it that the child thought him sane for a moment. It was something grown-up that she didn't know about. Her aunt's reply, with an uneasy half-laugh in it, was an attempt to soothe and conciliate. "Whatever are you fancyin', Robert?" she said nervously. "Who's planning or scheming? Just you come up to

bed, and be done with your talk-talk-talk. Affidavits and lawyers! Where shall we be next?"

"Don't you think to take me in!" His reply was in manner perfectly sane and coherent—that of a shrewd man of business, who sees through a clever imposture, being himself cleverer still. "Don't you think to take me in! I wasn't born last Sunday mornin'. Now look 'ee here, Pry-scilla Coupland! Shall I tell yer something I know? Shall I tell yer a little thing I know? A little—little thing?" This was said as a question of superhuman slyness, as he pointed an intuitive finger to emphasize it and waited. Then, quite suddenly, he became ferocious. "What the Hell, do you think I don't *know*? Do *you* think *I* don't know that it's *you* that's in behind it all? Ah!—you and Jim. One as like as t'other. It's a bloody conspiracy, I tell yer. And I'll make yer pay for it. I'll make yer pay." Still, Lizarann was impressed that he was speaking of something real, as there is nothing *per se* insane in an idea of a conspiracy, however groundless.

But when he next spoke, she saw that he was really mad. For her aunt, perceiving that her attempt at a soothing tone had only made matters worse, tried a little intimidation. "You wouldn't kerry on like that, Robert, exceptin' you knew Jim wasn't here. But he's a-coming, and I tell it you, for you to know. So just you bear it in mind—there!"

"Jim's over there. I seen him." He pointed to the bed.

"Talking silly, you are! His bed's empty, anyhow! But he's a-coming—that I tell you, plain. Now you come along upstairs."

"Aha!—right you are, Mrs. Hess." This was the initial of Steptoe. He went on with a sly triumphant wrinkling of his face, that mixed oddly with the tremor of eye and lip that is part of this disease. "No, he ain't in that bed. But I can tell yer where he is—he's under it! That's where Jim is. I seen his eye, plain to see! . . ."

"Jim's eye, ye silly! Come to bed, and sleep your drink off. Ye born fool! Jim's eye!"

"Ah!—Jim's eye. The one he opens at night. He's under-'anded and sly—sees a rare lot more than he'll put a name to! Why, I seen it, God damn you!"—with a sudden revival of ferocity—"I *seen* it, I tell you, there under that there bed."

Then Lizarann knew that he was mad. Of course, she knew nothing of *delirium tremens*, but she knew quite well the state often described as "mad drunk," and that her uncle when so affected always became violent; although since that occurrence three months since, fear of Jim had been a wholesome check. Oh, if

Daddy were only here!—so thought Lizarann, as she stood in the doorway with her teeth chattering, and literally sick with terror.

"I tell you I *seen* it, and I'll tell you some more. Only just you stand still. I'm a going for to cut it out, by Goard! Only you wait till I get my * * * knife. . . . It's round the * * * corner against the window. . . ." These were the last articulate words Lizarann heard, as her aunt followed their speaker into the front room. Then the voices of both in confusion—his raving, hers concealing apprehension badly under an attempt at command. This for a while; then a rapid crescendo of terror ending in a shriek, and an appeal to Heaven-knows-who to get the Police. And Lizarann—not seven yet!—had to make up her mind what to do.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THE RECTOR OF ROYD TOOK A WRONG TURNING, AND PICKED UP LIZARANN IN THE SNOW. MR. STEPTOE'S KNIFE, AND HOW LIZARANN MADE HIM LEAVE HOLD OF IT. HOW AUNTIE STINGY WAS HANDY IN CASE OF ANYTHING, AND UNCLE BOB WENT TO SLEEP ON A SECOND-HAND SOFA

When the Rev. Augustus Fossett, the brother of Lizarann's schoolmistress, and incumbent of St. Vulgate's Church, Clapham Rise, got hæmoptysis, his friends tried to persuade him to throw up his appointment and go away to Australia or South Africa. His brother Jack wanted him to chuck the Church, and take to some healthy employment—the young man's expressions, not ours—and took the opportunity to generalize overmuch, on the subject of the causes of death among the Clergy. He said that something he referred to merely as "it" was "all very fine, but two-thirds of them died of consumption." He was devoted to his brother, and wanted badly to get Gus clear of that filthy slum, with its horrible rows of little houses that had two or three families in them before the mortar was dry. But Gus refused to comply with his family's wishes. "I know Jack thinks," said he, "that if he could only get me into a lawyer's wig, or a sailor's trousers, I shouldn't have an apex to my right lung, practically. And moist sibilant *râles* would be things unheard of." He added that he wasn't married, and never meant to be; that the neighbourhood was healthy, if it was a little damp; and that all he wanted was change of air now and again. Taylor would come and take his duties for a week or so, and he would go to Royd, and Bessie Caldecott would nurse him up, at the Rectory.

For the Rector of Royd, whose acquaintance the story has already made, was, in his relation to the Rev. Gus, the other half of one of those friendships that, according to Tennyson, have mastered time. So every now and again, as occasion arose, the Rev. Athelstan's broad chest and shoulders loomed large in the pulpit of St. Vulgate's, and his voice sounded altogether too big for the architectural treatment of the east window.

About six weeks before the story-time of last chapter, the reverend gentleman had said to his sister-in-law: "Bess, I can't have

Gus kill himself this winter. He'll do it in the end, but let's keep him here as long as we can. I'll go and see to his parishioners in January, and he must come here. You mustn't let him work hard, and give him no end of cream and new-laid new-laid eggs. I can get Tom Cowper to do his work in February, and then I'll come back and take him for walks. Ah dear!" The Rector's anxiety about his friend got to the surface, through his tone of serene confidence, which was factitious.

"What are we to do about Phœbe and Joan?" said Miss Caldecott.

"Isn't it very likely all nonsense about infection?"

"I don't know." Then both looked perplexed; and that, as we all know, doesn't do any good.

"There's plenty of places for them to go to . . ." said the Rector; but didn't say where.

"But they'll be so heart-broken," said Miss Caldecott, "if they are away when their uncle's here." For Mr. Fossett had always held rank as a "putative" uncle to Phœbe and Joan, with natural confusion in their minds as a result.

"We must think it out somehow," said the Rector. "Their *potatoe* uncle! Ah dear!"

It must have been thought out somehow, without danger of infection to Phœbe and Joan; for January saw Augustus shepherding the flock of Athelstan, and Athelstan heavily afflicted with the population of a suburban slum. "At least," said he to himself, in the small hours of the morning, as he plodded back to his temporary residence from a death-bed side, through a thick snowstorm—"at least in the country we are still Shakespearian. These Londoners get more unintelligible every year." For a youth whom he had heard communing with another had first said, "I'll have your hat, Maria," which seemed to have no meaning; and then when the other said, "What price 'Igh 'Olborn, Joe?" had merely replied, "So long," and trotted away whistling.

They were the last defilers of the English language, though, that he heard speech of for the best part of a two-mile walk. For all that had a bed to go to had done so an hour or more since, and left the white world to the snowflakes and the police-force—the latter sadly outnumbered by the former, and fairly driven to whatever shelters official obligation allowed. For the flakes, which at midnight had been large and rather benevolent than otherwise, with a disposition to lie down quietly and not fuss, had become small and vicious and revengeful, and were rushing point-blank along the streets seeking for the eyes of passers-by and finding none. The gas-lamps, which had at first enjoyed melting them as

they came down, were giving up the attempt in despair, and had each its incubus of thickening snow to darken it. The Rev. Athelstan found it pleasant and stimulating—it reminded him of the Alps, years ago—and he had only met three vehicles, all told, in the whole of his walk, so far. One was a belated coster's cart, drift-blocked, whose donkey, its owner, and a policeman were trying to help it out of its difficulties. He lent a hand, and the rest of his physical resources, most effectually, and earned benedictions and a certificate that he was the right sort. Both the policeman and the costermonger spoke as though several sorts had been tried, and been found wanting. The former, as he wished him good-night, remarked that it was a blizzard this time, and no mistake, as though serious mistakes had been made in the classification of previous examples submitted. A sense of pass-exams. hung in the air. The Rev. Athelstan said good-night, and tramped or waded off through the snow, acknowledging to himself that he didn't know why a blizzard was a blizzard. Now his impression had been that this one was a bad snowstorm. However, a policeman would know, of course.

"American, I suppose," said he to himself, "and well up to date! Now I wonder . . ." He stopped opposite a wayside inn standing back from the road; a record of the days of an old suburban highway, with a drinking-trough for horses and a troughlet for dogs, and a swinging sign, half obscured by snowblotch that might fall off, or not. But it would in a minute, if waited for, for its framing creaked in the wind. "I wonder where I am?" he continued. "I've seen this pothouse before. I've photographed it, if it's the same. It was the Robin Hood." A snow-slip occurred at this moment, and left the outlaw's face and a portion of the merry greenwood visible. Oh dear yes!—the Robin Hood. No mistake about that, anyhow! The pause ended in complete enlightenment. "Then I know where I am. There's the new Cazenove slum on the left. Now I've got to take care not to go down the wrong turning. One's a *cul de sac*, ends in a fence. But I fancy mine's the next—yes!—mine's the next. Addy Fossett's school's just a bit farther on. Lady Arkroyd said it wasn't a slum! A slum made up of whited sepulchres—well! suppose we say machine-pointed brick sepulchres, and let 'em go at that." The difficulty of walking through the snow, and the silence, both seemed to favour soliloquy. He plodded on, driving aside the dry white snowdrift with his feet, and cogitating.

How deadly dark and silent it is down this side-street! Only one gas-lamp alight that one can see, some way on. And the

silence! One might be murdered here so quietly, with so little inconvenience to one's murderer. And the cold! "Thank God it *is* me and not Gus," says the man in the snow through whose mind these thoughts pass. "He wouldn't be kept at home, even by a blizzard. Really—if I hadn't a good pair of eyes . . . Hullo! what's that?" He quickens his pace towards something he has seen or heard.

An instant after, and the silence has vanished. Piercing shrieks are on the night—a child's shrieks—shrieks of frenzied and intolerable panic, there, where nothing can be distinguished yet. . . . Yes!—*there*—coming this way through the snow—this side of the dim lamp-gleam the snowdrift all but hides . . . but oh, so small! How can a thing so small give such a cry?

How can it struggle so, either, as it is caught and picked up by a pair of strong arms, and wrapped in the bosom of a big overcoat? "Anything"—said the Rev. Athelstan, when he told the tale after—"anything to get the poor little barefooted, nightgowned scrap up off the snow, and out of the cold! The *pluck* of the midget! I never saw such a baby. Not seven yet—just think of it!" For he often told of this adventure of his afterwards. But let us tell it now.

"Oh, pleathe—pleathe—let me down!" It is such a heart-harrowing cry for liberty that its hearer almost believes himself cruel to shut his ears to it. But—the cold! "Oh, *pleathe* let me go to c-call for the Spoleece to c-come to . . . Uncle Bob. . . ."

"*I'm* the Police, dear child, this time. You show me where Uncle Bob is, won't you? Hush-sh! . . . there, dear, now! . . . that way, is he? That's a good brave little girl. . . . In at this door, is it? *That's* right! *Now* I'll put you down." And then Uncle Bob's niece is on the ground, pulling with all her small force at the skirt of the big coat that has sheltered her. She doesn't believe the gentleman's statement that he is the Police; or only with some important reservations. But he is on the side of the right, she is sure, and is vast and powerful. It is no use her pulling, if he does not mean to come after all. But all is well, for he has only paused to get off the big coat the snow falls in lumps from as he leaves it behind him on the floor, and is pulled along the dark narrow passage towards some mysterious male voice out of all keeping with its surroundings—a voice with something of a Hyde Park orator's rant in it—pulled by the little nightgowned morsel that seems, now that the end is gained, and help has come, to be quite dumb with terror.

Along the narrow passage and through the door on the left.

The room is lighted by a candle at its last gasp on a side-table, and the gleam through the window, above the closed shutters, of the street-lamp outside. There is light enough to see all that is going on in that room, and it is a sight to give pause to the readiest help, and unnerve the most willing hand. For any succour, in the very bringing of it, may in this case undo itself.

Against the wall, in the corner next the window, is the ashy face of a terror-stricken woman, kneeling with hands outstretched to avert violence threatened by a man who is waving some weapon before her eyes, while he talks incoherently. It is his voice that sounded like a popular orator's, making telling points. What seemed a meaning when the words were unheard vanishes as they become audible.

"You keep still afore I pin you to the wall. You * * * well know that what I swear to by Goard's the * * * truth. Climb up and see—all I say is, climb up and see! The * * * noospaper's on my side, and d'you think they don't * * * know. . . . Ah!—would you?—steady—steady! I'll put a strap on either side of you to keep you steady. You and Jim thought you were going to have it your own blooming way. And where d'you think he's gone? . . . He—he—he!" He laughed a sniggering laugh. "Jim, he's gone along the railings. Now, don't you go sayin' I haven't told you, or I'll just rip you up afore the clock strikes. I can have your liver out just as soon as not. I can give a reference, by Goard! Just you ask my wife—she can get a * * * reference." And then the Rev. Mr. Taylor saw that what he held in his hand was a pointed cobbler's knife, a deadly instrument.

The little girl, clinging to him in convulsive terror, made sufficiently prompt action almost impossible. He felt that if he could have caught the man's eye, he might have been able to control him. But as it was, any movement on his part might have meant a stab in the woman's heart. He could see she had on only a thin sort of flannel wrapper over a night-dress, and he understood that the man, in his delirium, conceived her to be some enemy, not his wife certainly. What she was of course he did not know. The lips of his mind formed the simple word "drink"—the evil principle whose name accounts for half the ills flesh would have been so glad never to come to the enjoyment of, but must perforce inherit.

He dared not spring upon the man to pinion him, with that hideous knife so near the woman's life-blood. But a change was to come—one caused by the woman herself. She could barely gasp, so paralyzed was articulate speech; but the few words she said, "Catch hold upon him behind, master!" were heard and under-

stood by the man, who instantly swung round to be ready for some unknown opponent. The Rev. Athelstan felt greatly relieved. The position was simplified: he was now face to face with a delirious maniac with a knife—a knife that seemed made for murder—that was all!

"Thank God it isn't Gus, but me!" said a passing thought as he caught the madman's eye, just too late to unsettle, as he might have done—so he fancied—the delivery of a thrust backed by the whole strength of the arm that sent it. It was well for him—so straight did the blow come—that the clerical hat he pulled off to stop it had a wide hard brim and a round hard crown, good for a point to slip on. The boss of a Japanese targe could not have balked it more cleverly. Had it struck the centre straight, it would have pierced through to the hand that held it. As it was, it went aslant, striking twice on the shining silk nap, but quite harmlessly.

"Give me the knife, my man. I can show you how to use it better than that." His voice could not have been more collected if he had been reading the Commination Service, without meaning it, in the little old peaceful church at Royd. The delirious man, whose conception of his own position was probably that of a victim somehow at bay, surrounded by conspirators, was for a moment convinced that he would better it by compliance, and was indeed actually surrendering the knife, when the woman's hysterical voice broke in, and undid everything.

"Yes—you give the gentleman up the knife, Robert! You give it him to keep for you now you ain't yourself, for to take good care of and giv' back. He'll do the best by you! *You* may trust the gentleman . . . etc., etc." The Rev. Athelstan's mind said: "Deuce take the woman!—can't she hold her tongue?" but of course he said nothing so secular aloud.

The lunatic—for he was little else—had all but given up the knife, but of course now changed his mind. "*You're* answerin' for him, I see!" he exclaimed, with so sane a voice it was hard to think him delirious. "I can see round some of yer better than you think. Yes—Muster Preedy! Ah! . . . would you . . . would you? . . ." This with an expression of intense cunning, with the knife held behind him; and a dangerous tendency to edge back towards the woman, all the while watching the Rev. Athelstan with a sly, ugly half-grin.

As he got nearer to the woman, she became unable to control herself—little wonder, perhaps!—and broke out hysterically: "Oh, God ha' mercy!—stop him! stop him!—Oh, Lard!—oh,

Christ! . . ." and so on. It was time to act, and Athelstan Taylor knew it. Delay might be fatal. Guided by some instinct he could not explain, he shouted with sudden decision: "They're here, you fool! Can't you hear them?" and then, seizing on the pause in which the maniac's attention—caught also for the moment, perhaps, by railway sounds without—wandered to this mysterious "they," sprang upon him, and by great good luck pinioned his knife-hand as both rolled together on the carpetless floor. "Thank heaven it's me, not Gus!" thought he again, as he and his antagonist pitched heavily on the ground. He could feel the great strength there was still in the miserable victim of the fiend Alcohol. Often patients with this disorder will need three or four men to hold them—indeed, sometimes develope abnormal muscular strength, even while its tremors are running riot through their whole system.

But Mr. Steptoe's strength would have been abnormally developed indeed to enable him to contend against the successful competitor in a hundred athletic contests in the old 'Varsity days. A few sharp struggles, and he lay powerless, his adversary kneeling over him, grasping his two wrists, while he cursed and muttered below, before the railway sounds, connected apparently with the stopping of an almost endless luggage-train, had subsided into mere clinks that seemed to soothe it to stillness. But the knife was still in his right hand.

"Now where's that little maid?" Our little Lizarann had never run away, as some children might have done, but had held on bravely through the whole of the terrifying scene, full of admiration for this new Policeman—she almost thought he was really one; and when she heard him ask for her, she found voice to reply, not very articulately. She was there, please!—blue with the cold and her teeth chattering. Aunt Stingy was g-goed away. So much the better, the new Policeman seemed to think. He continued: "Very well, my child!—now you can be useful. . . . No, don't call your aunty. We'll do without her; she's no use. You do just as I tell you—just exactly!" Lizarann nodded her alacrity to obey orders. "Me?—yass!" is her brief undertaking.

The gentleman looked round at her, still grasping the wrists of his captive, who muttered on wildly, lost in a forest of execrations without meaning. He seemed satisfied that the child could be trusted, and determined at any rate to try a desperate expedient to get that horrible knife out of the maniac's clutch. The only other course would be to call or send for help. Send whom? This baby out in the snow again? Heaven forbid! As for the woman, *she*

was no use. He could hear her hysterics in the next room. No!—if the child only dared do exactly as he told her, he would soon have that knife safe out of the way.

"Look here, my dear, where's the box of matches—the lucifer matches? Now don't you be frightened, but do as I tell you. You light a match!" Lizarann obeyed dutifully, though her hand shook. "Now, you know, if you blow that match out, there'll be a red spark, won't there? . . . Very well then, or *yass,* if you prefer it. Now I want you just to touch your father's hand with it . . . oh, he's your uncle, is he? . . . well!—now you'll have to light another. . . . Now you touch his hand with it—don't you be frightened."

Lizarann followed her instructions without question. Whatever the gentleman said was right. *Her* duty was obedience. But she broke out in spasmodic terror at the result of what she had supposed to be some curious experiment; not to be understood by her, but certainly beneficial.

And Athelstan Taylor needed all his strength to retain the hand that was scorched, as his prisoner—or rather patient—gave a great plunge and a yell, as the fire touched him. But he kept his grip, though it was his left hand against the delirious man's right; and the knife, relinquished in the uncontrollable start, was left lying on the floor as he dragged him across the room away from it. He could breathe freer now that the knife was out of the way.

He inferred afterwards that the whole thing had happened very quickly; for the railway-occurrence without seemed to explain itself as a convoy of empty trucks shunting on a siding to allow an express to shriek past—an express that cared nothing for blizzards, and came with a vengeance, just as he gave his last instructions to Lizarann, waiting a moment for that little person's terror to subside.

"That's a good little girl. Now pick up that knife and take it away. And then . . . well!—and then . . . shut the door after you and go to bed, for God's sake, and get warm . . . What? . . . no!—never mind Aunt What's-her-name? . . . don't say anything to her—only go to bed too. What did you say her name was? Aunt Stingy?" It didn't seem probable, but the little maiden evidently felt surprised at its being thought the reverse. She confirmed it with gravity, and was departing, small and bitterly cold, but intensely responsible, when the new Policeman called her back.

"Look here, poppet!—you stand the street-door wide open, and then you go to bed. Now shut the door."

Lizarann obeyed religiously, and crept away silently to bed. Only, as she passed through her daddy's room with its empty pillow, life became too hard for her to bear. But tears came to help, big ones in plenty; and Lizarann's bed was kind. It absorbed, received, engulfed, all but cancelled the small mass of affliction that cowered into it and stopped its ears and did its best to cease. In two minutes after leaving the New Policeman, Lizarann was little more than a stifled sob, at intervals, in the dark; in five, at most, had cried herself to sleep.

Mrs. Steptoe, after giving way—quite excusably, to our thinking—upstairs for ten minutes or so, began to be aware that her self-control was returning. But being hysterical as well as human, she utilized it to go on moaning and gasping intentionally, some time after she had ceased to be able to do it involuntarily. Curiosity about who had given such a sudden and effectual succour then began to get the better of mere terror, and she perceived she ought to make an effort. So she went cautiously downstairs and listened, outside the door, to the voices in the front room; her husband's, now seeming less definitely insane, more weak and drivelling; and that of the stranger, whom she found it easiest to take for granted, although unexplained. Very severe shock makes the mind travel on the line of least resistance. No!—she wouldn't knock at the door just yet to ask if her services were wanted. That would do presently, especially as she expected stupor would soon follow her husband's outbreak, and if she showed herself now he might have a return. So after listening a few moments, sufficiently to satisfy herself that the stranger's voice showed a complete mastery of the position, Aunt Stingy retired into the bedroom adjoining, to be handy in case of anything—so she described her action afterwards—and then, having made sure that her niece was in bed in the little room and sound asleep, lay down on Jim's vacant bed for just a half-minute and closed her eyes. And would you have believed it?—or rather, it should be said, would Mrs. Hacker, to whom she told it, have believed it?—she was that dead wore out that only listening for two minutes to the voices going on steady, as you might say, set her off half unconscious-like, and in an unguarded moment sleep took her by surprise. Just the letting of her eyes close to had made *all* the difference! Kep' open, no such a thing! In this case they were not kept open, and there was such a thing. It took the form of profound sleep.

But before leaving the passage—the one known by the rather grandiose name of The Hall—Aunt Stingy first removed her

rescuer's overcoat, that still lay on the ground, and hung it on a neighbouring hook. A more intelligent person would have seen that its owner might want it, for warmth, in a fireless room. She must needs then decide that the street door had no business to be on the jar, and it was just that child's carelessness leaving it open; and closed it, noiselessly. This was fatal to a calculation of Athelstan Taylor's, for he had told Lizarann to leave the door open in the full confidence that the policeman on the beat would notice it; and that he would by this means be brought into communication with the outer world, without having to leave his dangerous charge alone in the house with that plucky baby and that weak woman!

No doubt a policeman did come down the *cul de sac* street, but even a policeman's step is inaudible on three inches of very dry snow. It is otherwise when the snow is partly thawed, especially if a second frost comes. Mr. Taylor concluded, believing that the street-door was "on the jar," that the policeman's bull's-eye would at once detect it, and that his guard was sure to be relieved; but the hours went by and nothing came. It is more likely, though, that the policeman passed at a moment of noise from the railway, for goods-trains occurred at intervals through the night.

More than once he was all but resolved to leave the man's side and summon the woman, or go himself for medical help, whatever the risk might be. But he did not know what other knives might be within reach, and he was one of those people who always decide on the righter of two courses, however little may be the difference between them. Not the smallest risk should be run through fault of his of harm to come to that plucky infant—well!—or to the woman, for that matter. But he was obliged to admit that he felt less keen on that point.

So, though he relaxed his hold on the man as his paroxysms of violence died down—for they were intermittent—he never allowed him to go quite free, and scarcely took his eyes from him to inventory the scanty contents of the ill-furnished room he sat in. For he contrived to shift the position in a moment of the patient's quiescence, some half an hour after he found himself alone with him; half-dragging, half-lifting him on to an untempting and unrestful sofa, whose innate horse-hair was courting investigation through slits and holes that had evaded the watchfulness of ineffectual buttons, guardians of its reticence in days gone by. One of those articles of furniture of which we know at once that the understraps have given, and will have to be seen to some day. An analogous chair was within reach; and the New Policeman, not in love with his job, but strong in his determination to see it out,

made up his mind to pass the rest of the night on it, if necessary, watching the fluctuations of his patient's delirium. Oh, how thankful he felt that all this had befallen him, not Gus! What a pleasure to think of his consumptive friend in the best room at the Rectory; sound asleep, said Hope, uncontradicted.

An hour or more passed. The violence of the patient had become more and more fitful, and seemed at length to be giving place to mere stupor. A little longer, and he would sleep. But suppose his heart failed and he died in his sleep. Mr. Taylor had had an uncle who drank, and who died of collapse after just such an attack of *delirium tremens*. Yes—but how long after? Then, on the other hand, there was no evidence to show how long this man's attack had been going on. Nor was the Rev. Athelstan quite clear that the case was uncomplicated; the brain might be unsound at the best of times. He tried to remember all he had seen or heard of the disorder. His impression certainly had been that insomnia was a characteristic symptom, and invariable. Now this man seemed to be sinking into a state of coma. He would keep watch over him, at least until he seemed quite unconscious, and then he would try to get help from without. He might be able to rouse a neighbour, and so communicate with the police and send for medical assistance. What he was most anxious to do was to get the man safe out of the way, at the workhouse-infirmary or the police-station, and to feel sure that he could leave the house safely with that child in it. He would come back next day as soon as he was at liberty, to find out more about her. It was fortunate that to-day was Tuesday, not Saturday—or rather he should have said, Wednesday, not Sunday. But one always thinks, when one has been up all night, that it is still yesterday!

Yes!—the breath of the man was coming more regularly, and his pulse felt slower and steadier. In a moment it would be safe to leave him and look for help. He withdrew his hand from the wrist it held and touched the sleeper's forehead. It was scarcely so hot as he had expected it to be. But it seemed insensitive to his touch, as there was no perceptible shrinking from it. The patient could be safely left for a moment.

He rose to his feet and stretched himself, glad of the respite. In the account of the affair that he wrote later to his substitute at Royd, he lays claim to having had no feeling at this moment but a wish for clean warm water to wash the touch of the drunkard's wrists off. He watched the motionless figure on the couch for a few moments, and the breathing satisfied him. He could be spared; for as short a time as need be, though.

He opened the door quietly and went out. But he returned to lock it; removing the key from within, but leaving it in the lock. Then he opened the street door and looked out. The little one had evidently misunderstood his instruction to leave it open—well! she really was almost a baby. However, that was enough to account for the non-appearance of any policeman. No police-officer ever leaves a "stood open" door uninvestigated in the small hours of the morning.

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE END OF THE BLIZZARD, AND OF SIMON MAGUS. HOW MR. TAYLOR FOUND A DOCTOR. OF A CHASE THROUGH THE SNOW, AND A CANAL-LOCK. WHAT WAS FOUND IN IT. BUT SIMON WAS INVISIBLE

How sweet and white and silent was the huge shroud of snow that lay so carefully on road and roof alike; unbroken, in this untrodden stillness, by so much as the memory of a rut inherited from yesterday's traffic; unmelted, even on the chimney-stacks, by the expiring efforts of yesterday's fires! How satisfied the stars that began to twinkle through the clearing veil of the snowdrift dying down, that the work of hiding London from them had been done thoroughly and well, and that they might shine on something clean at last! For the blizzard had gone to an appointment elsewhere, and the few flakes of belated snow that were afloat had given up all thought of blinding human eyes, and only seemed to pause in their selection of a resting-place. They had an *embarras de choix*.

As the sole spectator of the stillness stood looking out into the night, and thinking Wordsworth to himself, he saw the fixed red eye of a Cyclops railway-signal through the clear air; snow-scoured, and innocent, so far, of smoke. All that mighty heart was lying still—yes! But that engine, idling on the line and wide awake, felt free to wander to and fro, with clanks, and finally to execute an *arpeggio* of truncated snorts downwards, and give a sudden yell, and depart behind a steam-blast from beneath its apron. Then Mr. Taylor saw distinctly, at the end of his wrong turning, the fence that stultified it as a thoroughfare.

A wall of snow was against the lower half of the door, and the whole row of houses it made one of was nearly masked by the drift-pile heaped against it; and the snow that had caught and held against every roughness on the upright wall lay thick on every ledge and slope, and filled in every cavity. A sense of compromise was abroad in the air—an anticipated suggestion of a thaw; not yet, you know, but in time! Athelstan Taylor, as a neighbour's clock struck five in a hurry, knew so well what the shovels meant to sound like in the morning while all was still dry; and what the falls of snow would be like from uncleared roofs later on, when much would be slush.

There was not a soul in sight in the *cul de sac* street, which had so obviously been the wrong turning. There was consolation in that, though, for the Rev. Athelstan, for if it had been Gus and not he, Gus would have known his ground better, and passed on. But then!—what might not have happened to that poor little kid, asleep in there? However, it was necessary now to think what was to be done. Not a soul in sight, and hardly a sound to be heard; the very murmur of the city's traffic, that never quite dies, barely audible! Every house more than ever like its neighbour, in its cloak of snow. Which door should he choose, to knock at? One opposite looked the most promising, he thought. But he would put on his greatcoat before crossing through the cold night air. Where was that coat, by the way? So—back into the house to get it!

He struck a wax vesta to make the dark passage visible, and soon saw where the woman had hung it on a peg near the stairway. Should he, after all, go upstairs and rouse her?—Well, no, on the whole! Because he thought the woman bad for the patient, and better out of the way on that account. It did not occur to him that she was in the adjacent room, and the exploration above contributed as an obstacle to his decision. He felt readier for a colloquy with a roused next-door neighbour, than for shaking a stupefied sleeper to wakefulness—one, too, whom he had very poor reliance on. Besides, his own clearest scheme was to get some safe person to take charge of the patient, while he himself went for a doctor. If he did this, the doctor would come. If he sent, perhaps no! How could he tell?

But after this slight delay, just as well to look in at the sleeper once more before leaving him! The Rev. Athelstan, feeling very much like the New Policeman, opened the door cautiously. Just as well, for his charge was no longer where he had left him. He could see him in the half-light, blundering against the window-shutter, apparently without purpose, and talking to himself.

"Everything's took away, by Goard! Now if I could just lay 'ands on that there * * * knife, I could slit 'em all up. All the biling; and that 'd make me even with 'em! Who's makin' any offer to stop me?" He muttered on, and there seemed no object in interrupting him. Very likely he would lie down and doze off again. A few minutes' patience, anyhow!

Suddenly he stopped and turned. And then perceiving Athelstan Taylor as he stood by the half-open door watching him intently, he addressed him exactly as though he were one of a succession of applicants or customers, whom he had satisfied so far.

"Now who might you be, master? 'And over your job! I'll be answerable to see to it by to-morrow forenoon." He seemed for the moment quite composed and businesslike, then suddenly changed to shrewd suspicion. "Unless you're—unless you're—unless you're . . . No!—would you? That's not playing fair, by Goard! Come—you're a gentleman!—give a beggar his fair chance. . . ." For a sort of wily approach, as though to somehow circumvent an object of suspicion, had been promptly intercepted, and he found himself firmly held as before. Then an intolerable horror seemed to seize on him quite suddenly. "God's mercy—keep him off—keep him off! I'll never let on about him to no one. I promise. Only give me a blooming Testament. I'll swear!" He asked several times for a Testament, variously described, rather to the amusement than otherwise of his hearer, whose sense of language discriminated between words with meanings and expletives without. The drunkard's manner seemed to him to throw doubt on the validity of any affidavit made on an unstained volume.

But there was no amusement—nothing but a shudder—to be got out of the intense conviction of his delirium that there was some horror—some spectre or nightmare, God knows what!—in ambush behind the man who held him. Those who have nursed any ordinary fever-patient through the hours of low vitality in the night, know how hard it is to struggle against a sort of belief in the reality of his delusions—against the sympathetic dread, at least, that all but does duty for a real belief. In *delirium tremens* this conviction is overwhelming, and the Rev. Athelstan almost felt it would be an easement, just once, to glance round behind him, and make sure there was no one else in the room. And this, although the drunkard's description seemed to apply to a conjurer (with the usual drawback) who had escaped from his coffin, but might be got back if we was sharp. His conviction of the reality of this person was too fervid to be ridiculous, or anything but unearthly; even when he added, as confirmatory, that he was a Hebrew conjurer, as well as a sanguinary one. Simon Magus, perhaps?—thought the Rev. Athelstan. And when he told his friend Gus Fossett of this after, he pretended it had made him laugh.

The sound of a child crying, surely? Yes—the voice of the little girl, in an agony of grief or fear, in the next room! He flung the madman from him, and passed out of the room, locking him in. "I heard him," said he, afterwards, "begging me to keep Simon Magus off, but I couldn't stop to see to it." He went into the back room, where Lizarann, roused by memory of her miseries from the lighter sleep of morning, was shedding bitter tears because Daddy

was not there, but in the Hospital. Who does not know how the consciousness of affliction awaiting us will drag us awake, however much we may strive to remain in dreamland? Lizarann was glad of the gentleman, though, whatever he was. And it was all the easier for her to give a short abstract of her tragedy of the night before, that her aunt had gone upstairs to dress, as a preliminary to action in connection with the front parlour, whatever it was that was going on there. For whether anyone was there with her husband—the gentleman of the night before, or a policeman, or doctor perhaps—she had yet to learn. And she was horribly cold. A favourable disposition towards lighting a bit of fire in the kitchen was all the more marked on this account.

The very small person sobbing in a very dirty nightgown in the middle of the back room could not—so Athelstan Taylor decided—go on indefinitely unwarmed on such a morning as this. He rejoiced to feel that there was still plenty of vital heat in her rudiment of a carcass, as he wrapped it in the first thing that came to hand, a stray relic of a blanket of days gone by. He picked the little bundle, so compacted, up on his knee, and helped the subsidence of its sobs with a word or two of consolation. While doing so, he could hear what difficulties his case next door was getting into with Simon Magus.

"Berbecause derdaddy's in the Sussospital and hurted his leg," said Lizarann, as far as our spelling will carry us, in reply to inquiry.

"That's a good little woman! Now she'll tell me all about it. How did Daddy hurt his leg?"

Lizarann settled down to her narrative. Here was human sympathy, at last, for her real trouble. For all the dreadful scene of last night was only Uncle Bob; and of course that sort of thing was always happening, more or less, with uncles. Not daddies, look you!—that was quite another pair of shoes.

"There was free spoleecemen," said she, beginning like a true artist with the strong, conspicuous points of her narrative, "took Daddy along like carrying a Guy, only the spoleeceman he pictited me up and held me inside of the skirting for Daddy for to kiss me. And Daddy, he says why didn't I call out like he told me 'Pi-lot!' so he could hear? . . ."

"But was Daddy being carried on a chair?" The reference to a Guy had complicated matters.

"Not a chair to set upon. A hospital-barrer. With skirtings. Yass! But I hadn't called out Pi-lot, so Daddy could hear. . . ." Lizarann's conscience torments her on this point, which is one her

hearer cares very little about. He wants to find out what hurt Daddy's leg, and the extent of the damage. He waits a moment to listen; thinks he hears a silence in the next room, as though Simon Magus had vanished and left his victim in peace. Something like knocking about of furniture follows. But the drunkard is safe locked in. He can do no great harm for a few minutes anyhow.

"Was it an accident, or did he tumble down of himself?" he asks. He knows the child will understand. A mere fall on a slippery pavement would hardly rank as an accident with her. An accident, unclassified otherwise, almost implies a vehicle, among this class of Londoners.

"Yass!—an accident. The boy said so." A self-explanatory boy, the speaker seems to think. The hearer accepts him as explained. But what was the accident, and how much was Daddy hurt? Didn't the boy tell? Gradually all that Lizarann has to communicate is elicited, and Mr. Taylor takes a cheerful view of the outlook.

"Then Daddy's gone to the Hospital? They'll set Daddy on his legs again. What does Daddy do for his living?"

"He's a Asker. Askin', he does. Yass!" Lizarann's large dark eyes, and her gravity, added force to this. "Every dye, by the Rilewye Stytion, where I goes to fotch 'im."

Athelstan Taylor gave a low whistle. "Oho!—*that's* where we are, is it?" He at once recognised the little girl whose fame had reached him from the great house at Royd, with which he was of course in frequent communication. "You're Lizarann Coupland, then; Lady Arkroyd's friend?"

"Yass!" said Lizarann, nodding. Not that she was sure of it. But she knew there was a Lidy, come to see Teacher at School, she did; and she couldn't have been certain, off-hand, that this wasn't the Lidy's nime, in the face of the gentleman's statement. So she assented. She felt rather proud. Her daddy was well spoken of among the *élite* evidently. She continued: "And the boy said, he did, they could mike Daddy's leg well any day of the week at the Sospital, because they done his Aunt and Uncle. And a gentleman was a corpse they done, out of a shore. And Mr. Parker's teef they done, as good as new! So they was all *singin'!* Yass—they *was!*" This came in instalments; our report is shortened, for convenience.

Athelstan Taylor said afterwards to his friend: "I was getting so sleepy by that time, that I didn't above half enjoy the little maid's hopeful chatter about her Daddy, which of course I confirmed. I had to commit it to memory to laugh at it afterwards." Indeed, his great strength and endurance had been sorely taxed by

the trying nature of his long vigil; mere sitting up all night he would have made light of.

When Aunt Stingy appeared a few minutes after, having been employed in lighting the kitchen fire as projected, she found Lizarann still on Mr. Taylor's knee, kept warm in the extemporized wrap, and filling in the blanks in her narrative, in reply to his cross-questionings. With a curious lack of tact and insight, Mrs. Steptoe immediately denounced her niece's presumption, suggesting that the child had taken the gentleman by storm, as it were; and alleging that little g'yells ought to know better how to behave than that. The gentleman cut this ill-judged attempt to creep up his sleeve very short indeed.

"Now listen to me, if you please, Mrs. . . . what's your name? . . . oh—Steptoe. Mrs. Steptoe. I am going at once to get the nearest doctor to see your husband. And I think the best thing you can do will be to leave him quiet in the front room till I come back. He won't take any harm. And I hope when I come back I shall find the little girl dressed, with a nice warm fire to warm herself at. I suppose you can't get any breakfast for her yet awhile? . . . Well!—do what you can in that direction. Yesterday's milk is better than no milk." And with a very decisive refusal to take a cup of tea at any future time, on any terms, he buttoned his coat tight round him, and left the room. Lizarann heard the street door open and close, and then she was left friendless and alone with a formidable aunt. That good woman stepped out after the street door closed, and listened a moment at that of the front room, but finding all silent did not open it. She saw it had been locked, as the key had been inside overnight. Evidently her visitor had locked it.

She returned and afflicted Lizarann by a destructive co-operation in the gettin' of her frock on, a form of help that twitched its victim to and fro under the pretext of promoting her stability; that resented her offered assistance and denounced it as henderin'; that left her penalized by a sense of wrong hooks in wrong eyes, buttons adrift from their holes, and holes aghast at the intrusion of strange buttons. But Lizarann was used to this, and discerned in it the shortness of her aunt's temper. Her Daddy he'd always said poor Aunty she couldn't help her nater, and we must bottle up according. Lizarann beheld her aunt through a halo of Jim's patience and forgiveness.

Athelstan Taylor soon found the doctor in Cazenove Street, who

came readily in answer to his summons. It wouldn't do to lose sight of the case, he said. The man, who was quite well known to him as a typical case of Alcoholism, to the police as an habitual drunkard, and to the neighbourhood as always the worse for liquor, might very easily die of collapse if he wasn't carefully nourished when the reaction came. He would be much safer in a Hospital. Often in cases of this sort, life or death would turn on an injection of morphine on the spot. Heart-failure might be very rapid. He spoke as though Mr. Steptoe's decease would be a real calamity. Mr. Taylor, tramping beside him through the snow, tried to shape a thought that hung in his mind. How if he himself, who preached a Resurrection or Hereafter that as like as not this scientific gentleman did not believe in—how if he was less keen to preserve this depraved life, as a chance to clean it up a bit for a wholesomer departure later on, than the doctor in his professional enthusiasm, his sportsmanlike eagerness to win in a game of Therapeutics against Death? He felt a little ashamed of having thought more than once that the miserable victim of vice would be "best out of the way." Out of the way! . . . where? And then, how did he know that this consensus of all mortals to try and save even the most worthless lives may not be an unconscious tribute to the underlying sense of immortality throughout mankind? Would an honest belief in extinction fight to preserve a life that is a pain to itself and a curse to its neighbours? So thinking, he turned with his companion into Tallack Street. "Last house on the right, isn't it?" said the doctor.

What was that policeman doing in front of the last house on the right? Looking about on the snow as though in search for something, and then stooping forward over the low railing to examine the window-fastenings. It was all secure there when Athelstan Taylor came away. He quickened his pace, and the doctor did so too.

"Anything wrong, officer?" Both ask the question at once.

"Couldn't say, Sir. Be so good as not to tread on these footmarks. I want 'em kept till my relief comes. He'll be here in a few minutes. . . . No—the window's not been tampered with, so far as I see. That's where it's so queer."

All three stand silent a moment. Then both gentlemen exclaim at once that they see. The queerness is clear enough to both. The footsteps on the snow all point away from the window, and a glance shows that there is no corresponding track of an approach to it.

None of the three seem to think the mystery soluble, for the moment, and mere speculation is useless. The policeman supplies an

additional fact, but does not claim importance for it. The hasp of the window is visibly unclosed through the glass. But—so the officer testifies—they don't shut 'em to, as often as not.

"You can open it from outside," says the parson-gentleman to the policeman. "All right! I was coming to the house. I know the people."

"All right, officer!" says the doctor-gentleman. "You know me. Dr. Ferris, Cazenove Street." And thus encouraged the constable easily throws up the window from without. A touch on the shutters, and they open inwards. They reveal an empty room, and the track of the footsteps away from the window is at once explained—fully to the two who knew that a delirious man was the only tenant of the room, and clearly enough for purpose of action to the third, who only sees that some person, to whom the exclamation of both at once, "He has escaped!" applied, has been able to close the window behind him to disguise his flight, and may by now be far away at the end of a long trail they all start to follow, running through the snow as best they may. It is difficult to run, as the drifted snow is nearly knee-deep sometimes. But here and there the wind has kept the ground clear, blowing it like dry dust.

The track goes straight to the closing fence at the street end, at a point the youthful marauders of Tallack Street have chosen for inroads into the railway territory beyond. It is passable, for those who can climb a little, and whose clothes do not mind nail-rip or paint-stain. As the three follow one another over this obstacle, Athelstan Taylor and the doctor send back a shouted word or two of reassurance to whoever it is that has opened the house-door and come out with a cry of alarm—woman or child or both. They do not stop to see which, but get on as fast as possible. The track ends for a few yards where the railway arch has made a gap in the snow, but it is soon found on the other side, and then is easy to follow over a desolation of land ripe for building—ripe for the creation of ground-rents—ripe with the deadly ripeness we all know so well, of the land that the hay will never smell sweet upon again, the land that even now awaits interminable streets of dwellings no man or woman of the days to come shall ever think of as a home in childhood. Easy to follow as it lies clear in the thick snow it has had all to itself, and will have till the road is reached that leads to the Refuse Destroyer, with its two hundred feet of chimney-shaft, from which a black cloud is pouring—presumably of refuse that has refused to be destroyed; or has reappeared after destruction in an astral body, or suppose we say disastral—and the canal, and the Breweries, and the Chemical Bottle Stout Works, and the Artificial

Food Works the Sewage Appropriation Company, Limited, are building down Snape's Lane this side of the canal-basin.

The track goes straight to the road, but on reaching it swerves aside, baffled by a hedge, or the memory of what was once a hedge, whose function has been reinforced by barbed wire; probably the last expiring effort of a pastoral age to induce sheep to remain on the land and be tempted by the dirty grass. The swerved footsteps follow on to an opening two sad stumps face one another in, and think, perhaps, at times of the days when they were a stile, and real villagers stepped over them, and distant London was unknown. Then the track is lost for a space in a maze of other tracks of men on their way to brew, to bottle stout chemically, to appropriate sewage, that artificial food may be stocked, in tins, for a race with powers of digestion up to date. Then is found again, and followed on to a canal-bank with Platonic locks that sleep sometimes from day's end to day's end, bargeless, and dream of a past when railways were unknown, and they were full of purpose, and the world was young. And then is lost again, at a bridge.

Stragglers are gathering round, anxious to satisfy curiosity about the nature of the search; also anxious to impart information about its object, whether possessed of any or not. Willingness to further the public interest, without any qualifications of data to go upon, is often a serious hindrance to the end in view. In this case several casuals, who have *not* seen a man in his shirt-sleeves, without ne'er a hat on, go by, are so anxious to mould the particulars of something else they *have* seen into a plausible substitute for information about the said man, that the necessity for hearing enough of their evidence to reject it becomes an obstacle trying to the patience of the searchers. It seems injudicious to snub a volunteer informant who see a party go along the road in the opposite direction rather better than an hour ago, with a sack over his head and shoulders, who "might have been a dorg-fancier, to look at, in the manner of describing him," and to tell him to shut up if he can't go any nearer than that; not only because this drastic treatment may discourage other informants who have really something to tell, but because, being put on his mettle, he proceeds to adjust his evidence to the facts, so far as he can ascertain them. He removes the sack from the head of his recollection, makes it walk the other way at any acceptable time; won't undertake, now you ask so partic'lar, that it hadn't shirt-sleeves, and surrenders the dog-fancier in favour of any vocation you are inclined to put a leading question about. In like manner, a party sim'lar to you describe come straight—according to other proffered testimony—acrost yarnder

open ground to this very self-same spot, and so forrard over the bridge to'ards the Princess Charlotte down the lane, and went in at the bar. But the photographic likeness of this person to any description you choose to give of the man sought for fails to establish the identity of the two, as he was seen on the previous day, maybe about dinner-time. Compromise is impossible; the informant stands committed to yesterday, past recall.

But the track on the snow is lost—that is the one fact clear. Give it up and go back?—is that the only course open to us? Not when the chase ends so close to a canal-lock. True, the footsteps do not go to the edge, but only because a wind-swept skirting of brick pavement is clear of snow. The last one is none so far off the stone curb, above the water. Look down into the empty lock, and think!

The parson and the doctor represent intelligent speculation; the policeman, official reserve ready to listen to information and compare it with his pre-omniscience; the gathering crowd of early workmen, the uselessness of defective reasoning powers brought to bear on insoluble problems.

After a moment the parson speaks to the doctor: "The ice is broken over there—just where the water is running in."

"Are you sure?" asks the doctor. "Isn't it only the wash of the water melting it off? But your eyesight is better than mine, I expect."

"No, there's a broken edge. The water-wash would scoop and leave a curve."

"What do *you* think?" the doctor asks the policeman, who replies briefly: "Gentleman's right, perhaps. Worth trying, anyhow! . . . Now then, some of you, idling round, I want that bit of ice broke up—against the lower gate. Look alive now! . . . Yes!—a couple of planks and a short ladder and a yard or so of scaffold-cord. Get 'em anywhere round! I'm answerable. Never you mind what anyone says—just you take 'em!" And the leading casuals, probably labourers on the building job down the lane, are off at a trot to requisition planks and cords. But not without establishing a slight collateral grievance, in the manner of their kind: "You've only got to *name* what you want, and we'll *get* it fast enough. Who's to know what you're askin' for, exceptin' you speak?"

Athelstan Taylor's surmise of course was that Uncle Bob had ended his run by falling into the lock at the upper end, where the ice was thin; and, breaking through it, had passed below the thicker ice, where he remained—probably jammed against the lower gate,

which was closed. He noticed that this conjecture was at once accepted, but that no living soul of all those present referred to it in words. Silence is kept about it, but for a word between himself and the doctor, even till after the planks and cords and ladder have come, and the planks are laid athwart the sounder ice at the lower gate. One man can stand on them safely without fear of its giving—perhaps two. But one can break the ice with a pick fast enough, as soon as he can get at it. Hand him down a shovel to clear the snow a bit!

The parson is feeling sick at heart with his long night's vigil, and as though he could hardly face the dreadful end. He shrinks back, not to see more than he need. Then from the depths of the lock comes the crackling sound of the ice that breaks beneath the pick. Then the tension of the growing excitement as those on the brink watch for a result they feel confident of.

"Nothing there?" . . . "Nothing that side." . . . "Now you keep steady across with your peck—right you are!—across the middle . . . don't go to sleep! . . . yes, now right up in the corner. . . . Something there?" . . . "Ah!—easy a minute till I catch holt . . . have that cord ready. . . . Got him?"

* * * * * * *

"You are quite certain nothing can be done?"

"Absolutely certain. He was ready for heart-failure, without being an hour under the ice."

"Will you tell the poor woman, from me, that I had no choice but to go? And that poor baby. . . ."

"Is there a baby?"

"Well—little girl of six then! Say I'll come at three to take her to see her father at the Hospital. You're sure it's the same case?"

"Not the least doubt. A blind sailor beggar—there couldn't be two. You know the wards at St. Brides . . . Never mind—you'll find out. . . . What is it, my good woman?"

It is a woman with a tale to tell. Briefly, that she looked out of her bedroom window about an hour and a half since, and saw what must have been the unhappy inebriate running across the field, looking back, time and again, as if he see some party follering of him. Then he come to the lock, and stood close over the edge—back to, as you might say. So standing, he went wild, on the sudden, and threw up his arms, and there!—he was over in the lock, afore you could reckin him up like—clear over! Both her hearers are indignant, or perhaps incredulous about the truth of the story. For if she really saw this, why in Heaven's name did she give no

alarm?—the man's life might have been saved! She expresses contrition as for an error of judgment, but no great remorse. She told her master—meaning her husband—who said it was a queer start. But it was that early! The exact bearing of this fact on the matter was far from clear.

"She'll have to tell her tale before the coroner, anyhow," said the doctor, as he showed his companion a short-cut into his road home. "Well!—now keep straight on—you'll be in the main road in five minutes. I hope you'll get a good breakfast and a good sleep before you marry those two sinners. Good-bye! Remember, straight on!"

For the Rev. Athelstan had told this gentleman of the binding engagement that he had to keep that morning as *locum tenens* at St. Vulgate's. He had with difficulty persuaded a navvy to remedy an omission in his duties towards the mother of his family, whom he had never led to the Altar of Hymen; and the said navvy had consented to do so this morning, and was rather entering into the fun of the thing. But if the parson were to fail in his appointment, was it certain that the delinquent would be brought to the scratch a second time?

However, he had still time for breakfast and rest before this appointment was due. So he walked briskly on through the thick snow, sad at heart, but wonderfully little the worse physically for his terrible experience. And as he walked he shuddered as he thought of the unhappy case of Alcoholism, flying over the spotless, virgin snow from God knows what, to his death. "I suppose Simon Magus had got out, after all, and was sharp on his heels," said the Rev. Athelstan, and then added: "At any rate, I'm glad it was me, not Gus!"

CHAPTER XV

HOW LIZARANN WAS TAKEN TO MISS FOSSETT'S, BUT HAD A STITCH IN HER SIDE, AND WASN'T TO GO TO DADDY TO-DAY. HOW THE RECTOR WENT TO JIM IN THE HOSPITAL, AND JIM WAS DISAPPOINTED ABOUT HIM

If Lizarann had had no grounds for looking forward to a reappearance of the curious New Policeman who had rescued her, she would have been more on the alert about the events of the previous night that concerned Uncle Bob. But she had no doubt her rescuer would come back. And this anticipation, as well as the hopeful tone in which he had spoken of Daddy's prospects at the Hospital, set her mind quite at rest about everything but the thing which presented itself to her merely as exaggerated domesticity. It was Uncle Bob, only rather more so.

Seen from her point of view, the events that had preceded Uncle Bob were that Daddy had been in collision with a Pickford's Van, and had suffered, but not murderously, from the accident; that he had not been able to walk, because of his leg; and that he had been carried away by well-disposed officials to an institution that promoted soundness of wind and limb, and had even been known to make its *bénéficiaires* musical. A child's mind knows no proportion; and the last item, which was really a gratuitous invention of the boy whose name was not Moses, gained credence with Lizarann slowly, and ended by throwing every other particular into the shade. Further, she knew that Uncle Bob, considered as an infliction, had been worse—for he was to her merely an endemic disease that increased or diminished, like gout—and that he had run out in the snow. Nothing abnormal in that; besides, the police, new and old, had run after him, to say nothing of the doctor-gentleman from the house with "Surgery" wrote up big, where you could get a supply of medicine if you said where you come from, and took back an exhausted bottle with a surprisingly high number on it, considering its pretensions. And these events having passed muster as normal, what followed was only natural.

Her aunt had shown at first dispositions to join the chase, but had desisted in consequence of remonstrance from neighbours, who had begun to be aware that history had been in the making during

the night at Steptoe's; he, though chronic the previous evening, having become acute in the small hours of the morning. Mrs. Hicks and Mrs. Hacker, and others, having trooped round the vortex of excitement, had counselled Aunt Stingy to remain where she would be of some use, and not go canterin' over the buildin' land with no object, in the manner of speaking. Wasn't three plenty?

Jimmy 'Acker, told off to follow the trail in the snow and bring back word if he see 'em coming, had come back uneasy and evasive, had told contradictory stories about what he see, and had confirmed the public belief in the untrustworthiness of boys. Questioned, during ostracism, by his sister and Lizarann, his replies had been mysterious, and his refusal to make them less so unintelligible. The expression, "Just you wait and see if what I told you ain't k'rect," laid claim to having said something, sometime; and no effort of his hearers' memory confirmed his having done so. Other emissaries departed to get information, and did not come back.

This state of uncertainty had been ended by the reappearance of the policeman and the doctor, who climbed back over the fence followed by straggling units from among those who had witnessed the scene at the lock. Everyone can read something written about Death on the faces of those who have just seen him.

"Now which of you women was this man's wife?" That was what Lizarann had heard the policeman—the old sort; she looked in vain for her glorious friend—say to wifehood within hearing. Whereupon Aunt Stingy became on a sudden hysterical, and was helped, gasping and crying, into the house. Lizarann wanted to go too, moved by pity for she knew not what—for something folk were speaking under their breath about to one another, not to her; nodding about, pointing about, to something past or present, beyond the railway-arch; drawing morals about and referring to their own foresight about. Then she had heard the voice of the doctor-gentleman:

"Which of you youngsters is his little girl? . . . Hadn't got a little girl, hadn't he? . . . Oh ah!—of course he hadn't. . . . I should say—which is the little girl whose dad's hurt his leg and gone to the Hospital? . . . Ah, to be sure!—Lizarann. Now, Lizarann, suppose you get your bonnet and wrop yourself up as warm as you can and come along o' me to Teacher at the School, just till Mr. Taylor comes to go to see Daddy with you. The big gentleman? . . . just him, and nobody else. Come along!" Which Lizarann did, with alacrity. Daddy was in view again.

Then had come a very pleasant phase of what had really seemed

more a dream than a reality, all along, to Lizarann. She had found herself being fed and washed and dressed and generally succoured by Miss Fossett, otherwise Teacher, at her private residence next door to the School, after the departure of the doctor-gentleman who left her there. She couldn't for the life of her make out whether it was good news or bad news he had been telling Teacher under his breath. All she knew was that she was somehow appointed to go to Daddy in the Hospital, and that nothing else mattered. Even had she known the tragedy of the morning, it would only have been the fact of Death that would have appalled her—not the loss of the man who died. Practically, the grave was already closing over the remains of Uncle Bob, or the chief part of them. Decision on that point scarcely rests with ignorance though; who shall say that even Alcoholism can efface a soul? Nips won't, however frequently took; a germ always remains. At least, that is our experience, or an inference from it.

It is always pleasant to feel at liberty to over-indulge a child, and Miss Fossett, a good-natured woman that might have married—that describes her—interpreted something the doctor had told her about Daddy as a licence to do so in this case. So Lizarann enjoyed herself thoroughly—may almost be said to have been pampered—in the interval between the doctor's departure and the arrival of the Rev. Athelstan. When the latter came, as promised, Miss Fossett had said something to him with concern, under her breath, and he had replied in a strain as of reassurance, to judge from his tone: "Never you mind the doctor, Addie. Like enough he was mistaken. Besides, he said he thought they might save it." Which, half-heard by Lizarann, only left an impression on her mind of the hospital staff on its knees hunting in the gutter for poor Jim's takings in coppers, spilt from his pocket last night when he met with this accident. Also at the moment Lizarann was doing some arithmetic by herself, *hors de concours,* and honestly believed she was conferring a real kindness on Teacher by adding up rows of figures for her. She would have done them quicker, only she had to stop to lick and rub out each carried cipher after writing in the next one. Also, when she got the values wrong in an eight, which is difficult, she had to rub it out and do it all over again.

"Lizarann says two and two make four, but fifteen and twelve don't make twenty-seven." Lizarann thought Teacher said this rather maliciously. But she was prompt in self-justification.

"Not of theirselves. Not till you do them in a sum. Like this. . . ." And she did it.

"Quite right, Lizarann! Of course they don't. But two and two will make four if you leave 'em alone ever so. Isn't that it?" Thus the gentleman—a sympathetic soul!

"Yass!" And the little woman felt that justice had been done. But she didn't know why maturity should laugh, as it did.

"They may save it, of course," Miss Fossett continued. "I don't see what's to be gained by taking the child to the Hospital, myself. Only make her miserable! It won't be half as bad if it's a wooden leg and he's up and well, as seeing him in a hospital ward. Besides, Dr. Ferris said he couldn't be certain they'd let you see him."

"I fancy they would. I know a man there who would manage it, regular hours or no!"

"I don't mean that. I mean it might not be safe for the man himself. Just think!—suppose they have had to amputate both." Of course Lizarann heard none of this. They were in the next room, having left her engaged in arithmetic.

"Yes—he may be betwixt life and death. After all, we know nothing. When did Dr. Ferris say he would be at the Hospital? Is that the child coughing?"

"Is that you coughing, Lizarann?" Teacher raised her voice to ask, and Lizarann replied that she had "a stiss" in her side whenever she licked the slite. She licked it to try, and the experiment was crowned with success. She then tried to readjust something out of gear inside her by short coughs and wriggles. This did not seem so successful. Teacher lowered her voice again: "Mucous membrane," said she, "or muscular."

"Very likely. She's had a deal of exposure though, snow and all. Let's keep our eyes on her." But Lizarann didn't cough again, that time.

Nevertheless Miss Fossett seemed not quite easy in her mind about that cough, and when Mr. Taylor remarked that he ought to be thinking about starting, if we were to get to the Hospital by four o'clock, she said—only she pretended it was quite a sudden idea of hers—that if she spoke the truth she would really be much happier to have the child not go out of doors in all this terrible cold and slush. For it was a thaw, and an enthusiastic one; and, you see, Miss Fossett had come by her knowledge of mucous membranes and so forth in a sad curriculum of two courses; one of nursing a sister through phthisis to death; and the other, which was incomplete, of doing the like at intervals for a brother, with only a poor hope that it would end otherwise. So she knew all about it.

"I really should feel easier, Yorick," she repeated. And Lizarann looked up from the slate to see who else was in the room, that Teacher could be speaking to. But seeing no one, and being a sharp little girl, she perceived that it was her friend the gentleman that was addressed. Only, of course, she couldn't guess that it was a sort of nickname, given, years ago, to her brother's schoolfellow by her friend the lady.

"*I* should, a good deal. It's not the right sort of day at all for little girls with coughs. How shall we console her?"

"*You* must."

"I suppose I shall have to, Addie. I always have to do all the dirty work." This metaphor distracted Lizarann's attention from two uneven numbers, one of which had to be took off the other and wouldn't come out right. Did the New Police scrub underneath the beds, clear the flues of sut, scour out the sink, and so on? Impossible! He went on: "Look here, Lizarann! You're a good little girl, aren't you?"

"Yass!"

"And you're not going to cry—that's about it, isn't it?"

"Ye-e-e—yass!" She is not quite so confident about this, but will conciliate public opinion to the best of her ability.

"Well, Lizarann, the doctor says we mustn't see Daddy till—till a day or two." The small face clouds over pitifully. The disappointment is bitter. But Lizarann won't cry—well!—not *yet*, anyhow. Yorick continues: "I shall go to the Sospital to hear about Daddy, and come back and tell. But you mustn't go yet, because it would hurt Daddy." He conceals his consciousness of the background of tears to the child's Spartan resolution.

"You'll see it will come, though," says Miss Fossett, saying goodbye at the street-door. "She'll have a good cry about it when you're gone. . . . But oh dear!—what a lot of stories you have told that child, Yorick."

"Of course I did. You put it on me, Addie, and then you sneak out! *I* call it mean. But oh dear!—what a lot of stories one does have to tell children!"

"You never tell them stories about anything you think serious. I know you don't."

"Yes, I do. I tell them as matter of knowledge what I know to be only matter of belief. They wouldn't believe it if I didn't say I knew it."

"But *you* believe it?"

"I do. But I don't know it. Good-bye, Addie! I shall keep my promise about the Hospital, though, and bring the news back.

Cosset over the little woman and console her." Which Teacher really did to the best of her ability, but the fact is that though Lizarann was brave, she was inconsolable. And—what was bitterest of all—she felt that faith had been broken with her; which, coming home too late to Miss Fossett, made her think that it might have been better to tell a child of Lizarann's character the real reason why she wasn't to go to Daddy. It was a doubtful point, though. Besides, it was far from certain, after all, that she could have seen Daddy if she *had* been taken to the Hospital. It would have been the worst result of all to fail in that, and have all the exposure for nothing.

So the Rev. Athelstan—or Yorick—certainly thought, as he started to walk to St. Brides, meaning to avail himself of a town-ward-bound hansom if one should overtake him before he got to the tram. Omnibuses were all full, apparently, inside and out; and the opportunity of enjoying a rapid thaw was open to those who had for three weeks been praying for one. Streets overwhelmed with insufferable slush, and what was beautiful clean snow only a few hours since turned to torrents of an inkiness defying explanation. Roads that made even the sufferer by the slides we so enjoyed the making of in the early morning wish that he, too, was on our side, and could benefit by them, and knock double-knocks on them and never tumble. And see them now, turned to mere ill-mixed morass—floating pea-soup ankle-deep! Scavengers' carts that seemed to spill more than they removed, and persons of low ideals of energy losing sight of the objects for whose attainment they had been entrusted with brooms and rakes, and contented to do nothing particular with them, in rows. Malignant persons on roof-tops discharging wicked accumulations on unsuspecting heads, and shouting out "Be-low!" at the moment of impact. Butchers' carts coming as close to you as possible, to splash mud in your mouth and inside your collar, and reaching the horizon long before you become articulate to curse them. And then that saddest of all depressing sights, the skater who has been warned off the ice that won't be dangerous for another hour at least, and is going home swinging his skates and doubting the benevolence of his Maker.

So onward, through abating suburb and increasing town, to the zone of the Effectual. Of impatient carts that won't wait for the snow to thaw, but snap it up and carry it away without offering to account for their conduct; of mowing-machines fitted with Brobdingnag revolving hair-brushes that will have to be washed now to be put to their proper use again, after sweeping up all that equivocal mess parallel with the kerbstone; of turncocks looking happy

from human appreciation in great force, and alone able to cope with obstructions or relaxations in the bowels of the earth whose nature we outsiders can only dimly guess at. So travelling onward, on foot and by tram, the Rev. Athelstan arrived at his destination, and slipping the fare he had provided for the cab he had discarded into the contribution-box at the gate, entered St. Brides Hospital.

"I didn't know you were in these parts, Taylor," said his friend, the House Surgeon. "Haven't seen you for a century. . . . Yes!—I know I am right. It's two years next Lady Day. How's the family? How's Miss Caldecott? . . . all right, are they? That's well. Now let's have a look at you. Turn round to the light. . . ."

"I'm all right."

"Didn't say you weren't. Let's have a look! Turn well round and show yourself . . . h'm!"

"Well!—what's the matter?"

"I thought as much! You've been dissipating, my man. *Your* sort of dissipation! What was it this time? You've been up all night, my good sir! It's no use your trying to deceive me."

"'I will not deceive you, my sweet!'" Mr. Taylor quoted Mrs. Gamp, and was understood. "I chanced upon a bad case of *delirium tremens* threatening its lawful wife with a knife, and I stayed to see it out. Poor fellow!"

"H'm—why poor fellow?"

"Because I locked him up and went for the doctor round the corner. He said he knew you. Man of the name of Ferris. Good sort of little chap. . . ."

"I know him. Saw him yesterday—came to see a patient here. Well!—what did he say to your man?"

"He never saw him alive. While I was away the poor fellow escaped out of the room, ran a mile and a half through the snow, and pitched himself into a canal-lock. . . . Oh yes!—he was fished out dead from under the ice. . . ."

"Rather a good job, I should think. . . . However, perhaps I oughtn't to say that. . . ."

"Glad to hear you say so, Crumpton! It sounds hopeful."

"I didn't mean that way. I meant he might have been an interesting case. Anyhow, there's an end of *him!*"

"I wish I could think that. But suppose I tell you what brings me here now: we can quarrel about the human soul after. I want to hear about a man that was brought in yesterday night, a blind sailor-beggar that was run over. Have you seen him?"

"Rather! I helped to get his leg off, just above the knee. A very good case—a very good case!"

"What does that mean!—a very good case?"

"Means that if the limb hadn't been taken off on the nail, septic poisoning might have set in—yes!—already!—By the merest chance Brantock was here when he was brought in—he's our visiting surgeon, you know—and he operated immediately. . . . Save it? Not a chance—arteries all torn—circulation stopped—nothing for it but the knife! The other leg we may save. He has a splendid constitution. Couldn't have kept him so long under chloroform else."

"The other leg?"

"Compound comminuted fracture of tibia and fibula, with extensive laceration of soft parts. Much extravasation. But vitality retained. Oh yes!—we may save that one. It's in plaster of Paris. He was removed into the surgical ward an hour ago. Do you want to see him?—he can't talk, I fancy, and he'd better not try. He's had a good deal of opium to allay pain, you see."

"*May* I see him? I should like to say I have to his little girl. Poor child! The *delirium tremens* case was her uncle, and she has no mother. She's the poor chap's only child."

The House Surgeon put a book he had been looking into as he talked, inside a desk and locked it; wrote with extreme rapidity on half a sheet of note-paper as people write on the stage; handed it to a chubby nurse who seemed to have been indulging optimism while waiting for it; remarked to her, "That's three hundred and forty-nine. I'll see about the other presently;" and said to the Rev. Athelstan, briefly, "Come along!"

Poor Jim was worse now, as far as his own feelings went, than when he spoke to Lizarann off of the hospital-barrer. *Then* he was, in his own eyes, a chap that had been knocked over and come by some damage to his legs, which a week in hospital would set right. Pain enough!—ah, to be sure!—and what might you expect? Not for to lie up in cotton-wool all the days of your life. As a Spartan, and as against pain, with the normal courage of his healthy hours upon him, Jim was matchless. Add to that, that when he said those few words to his little lass, all the pain was as nothing in itself, measured against the need that she should not know it.

It was that nasty suffocating stuff that knocked all the heart out of a man, getting at his innards and stopping his clock. For when the time came to shift Jim from the couch he was first laid on to the operating-table, and to place him under chloroform as a

preliminary, he was conscious enough of much that was going on—had drawn his own inferences from the rapid undertone of consultation ending in a raised voice: "Perfectly useless to try for the left. May save the right!" In that instant he gave no thought to his own share in the matter; all he could think of was the coming of the knowledge to his child that her Daddy was legless as well as eyeless. Three things made up his universe—his little lass, a crushed and spoiled thing on a couch, and that mysterious thing, Jim's Self, independent of both, but mad with anxiety for the former—until the chloroform came and made all three things Nothing.

However, Jim never knew he was Nothing, because he had no sooner swallowed the nasty stuff into his lungs than he was feeling very bad, and sick-like, on a bed he had never been moved to at all, to his very certain knowledge. And he was able to guess, although he could not move his limbs to test it, that he was in the form in which he was to fossilize. Then, as the slow rally of a splendid constitution against the shock began, there grew with it an intense longing to know what manner of figure he was going to cut when reinstated. Would it be one wooden leg or two wooden legs? Would he be able to walk at all? Would he, in short, be in trim to persuade his little lass that he was on the whole rather better off than before his accident? He really thought of nothing else when awake. But he chiefly slept, rousing himself for dexterous doses of nourishment at short intervals. And when he slept, he dreamed, as folk dream whose pain opium has half quenched.

He would have done very well in his dreams if he could only have had them to himself, and been free from an awful *something* that ran through them all. Whereof the only certainty was that it was always the same, and a curse. Preferably, as to form, it was cubic and immovable, but of hideous weight. But then, it was by no means certain that it was not a continuous sound, a sustained hoot of appalling power and persistency that struck terror to the heart, and jarred the brain. Or was it a wild beast, that kept the ship's crew from going ashore? Or an evil fire Jim was hard at work to crawl away from, but could not, seeing that it could follow him on wheels? Or, hardest to describe of all—when he woke from his dream to recognize a fact he had recognized fifty times uselessly, that it was merely his pain and nothing else—was it a strange concerted action of malignant battalions, always coming nearer, never in sight? It made him sick to know that it was each and all of the others, just the same. Now if he could only have enjoyed his dreams—for, look you, he could see in his dreams,

plain—he wouldn't have minded the pain, if he could only have kept it square and intelligible. It was just the confusion that made him so hot and dry, so unable to get properly *rangé*.

For instance, there was a dream of eight years back with Dolly in it. Dolly was Lizarann's mother, and the reason Lizarann was not called Dolly was that Aunt Stingy had always thought it such a *selly* name, and it had appeared to Jim that it couldn't much matter what anything so small was called. Its size was all he knew of it, and a milky flavour, and some squeaks. And Jim was in the dark, and Dolly in her grave, and nothing mattered.

Jim was in the dark now, with a vengeance; but he could dream Dolly out of her grave, and did it, in this dream. It was a dream of the day he met her, when he came off his first voyage, a mere boy, and a perfect stranger to her. There was the bar he and his mates off the *Pera* had trooped into for refreshment, just paid off and feeling good, with money in their pockets. There were the square bottles with names on the glass, and the round ones all over labels, and the pump-handles in a row that Dolly's red-faced cousin Jane, the barmaid, was in the confidence of, but which everyone else would have pulled wrong. There, too, was the girl that came in behind the bar and berthed up alongside the red-faced cousin, just as Murtagh O'Rourke called back to him through the swing-door, "We're lavin' ye behind, James, me boy," and vanished. And the girl was Dolly—Dolly herself. Jim didn't know in his dream that he had married Dolly since, and that she was dead—not he! It was all new and young again, and in a moment he would hear Dolly say what she did then, when after some chat—during which the eyes of each saw the other solely, Dolly's flinchingly, Jim's greedily—the red face was called away and left them. Yes!—he knew what she would say, "You never daren't come across to me," and that he in defiance of all Law and Order would be over that bar like a shot, and then would be driven forth by the righteous rage of the returning barmaid, with the remains of a kiss on his lips, the spoil of war in this audacious enterprise. And all the sequel of the story—how Dolly ran after him to say he might come back, under reserves; and the lightning speed of their unsophisticated courtship, under none—all this he knew in the dream beforehand, but did not wonder why he knew it—took it as a matter of course.

It never came off, though, for the dream never got as far as the kiss, to Jim's bitter disappointment. Jane, the cousin, instead of clearing out and leaving the introduction to nature, swelled and became redder still and very hot, and ended inexplicably by becoming the pain that had passed through so many vicissitudes. Where-

upon Jim was awake in the dark, somewhere. And a man's voice, one good to hear, was saying, "I'll sit down by him and wait till he wakes, nurse. I promised little Lizarann I would see him."

"That's my little lass!" said Jim faintly. And the nurse said, "I thought I heard him speak." Then Jim felt that a big man came and sat beside him, who asked him what he had said. So he repeated, "The name of my little lass at home, master," and then had said all he could, and went off again in a drowze, and was far away in a new dream in two seconds. In perhaps five he woke again with a start and said: "Have ye been here long, master?" But his mind must have travelled quick from the dream he was in, and his place in it. For he had to come back to bed No. 146 at St. Brides Hospital from Singapore—from the hold of a ship a Malay sailor had hidden himself in, after running amuck through the decks, wounding right and left. And Jim and Ananias Driscoll, the second mate, were the only men who would dare to ferret him out in the dark, with a horn lantern and loaded revolvers, to use in earnest if need was. And, mind you!—the fugitive might have put fire to the ship, as lief as not, except they caught him. Now the bilge in this ship, or something broke out of a cask in the hold, had a powerful bad smell with it, that had a mortal strange effect on your legs. And when Jim said so to Driscoll, a voice came that was not Driscoll's, and Jim became aware that he was somehow in a trap, and woke just in time to escape it. But the smell of that bilge was the pain of Jim's foot; for the foot was there still, for all it had been cut off and carried away in a pail. And the voice that had seemed Driscoll's, which was quite an unnatural one for a sailor with earrings, and a crucifix tattooed on his chest, was identified half-way by Jim's waking sense, and Singapore had melted.

"Scarcely a minute," said the man who sat beside him, completing Driscoll's speech. Which seemed incredible to Jim, after that affair at Singapore. But he let it pass, the more so that at that moment the nurse brought him something in a cup, which made him feel better.

"You was so good as to mention, master . . ."

"Your little girl? Yes—I saw her, an hour since. . . . Look! —I'll put my ear down, close. Needn't try to raise your voice!" For Jim had something he wanted to say badly.

"You'll not be mentioning any matters to my little lass, sir," said he slowly. And then, as though he felt his words were a little obscure: "You might chance to be saying something regarding of the matter of my fut. Ye see, master, a young child don't take these-

like things as easy as we do, and my little lass's heart will be just abroke about her Daddy's fut. I'd take it very kind of ye if ye'd make any sart of a bit of contrivance like, only for a short spell o' deception, just till I get the heart in me to make a game of it all. It's the chloroform done it. A fair casuality don't knock all the heart out of a man. . . ."

"Your little girl will have to know about it in the end."

"Ah!—in the end—yes! But then . . . a wooden leg! See the difference! Why, I can most hear the lass laughing at it." Jim paused a few seconds to enjoy Lizarann's imagined hilarity, then added: "Ye'll keep it snug about my fut, master? A stump's a stump, ye know."

"She shan't be told any particulars yet, Coupland. Don't try yourself talking too much." For Jim's long speech has made his breath come short, and his last words are almost inaudible. He submits to listening. "The doctor has told me all about the accident. You'll have to have a wooden leg. Let me tell you about Lizarann." The way the speaker, whoever he is, accents the child's name, makes a family friend of him at once. Jim, with a vague picture in his mind of a sort of guardsman with quiet manners, moves his own big right hand, hot and weak now, as it lies on the coverlid. It is taken by another as big and the image of the guardsman is confirmed. Its voice suits the hand, and continues: "We thought it best for her not to come—Miss Fossett and I did. You know Miss Fossett, at the National School."

"Sure!" Jim's intonation acknowledges Miss Fossett, with approval in it. Athelstan Taylor had made up his mind how much it would be safe to tell of last night's work, so he continued:

"Your little maid and I made friends early this morning. I was passing by your house, and she came running out. Her uncle had been drinking, and his behaviour had frightened her. . . . What's that?" He stoops down again to hear, and Jim tries for clearer speech:

"The Devil he'll take Bob Steptoe one of these odd-come-shortlies, or I'm a liar. Only I wish he'd . . ."

"Wish he'd what?"

"Be alive about it—look a bit smarter! What was his game this time, master?"

"He was drunk and violent, and I had to control him. He's quiet now. I'll tell you more, Coupland, when you are stronger."

"Very right, sir!"

"I'll tell you now about Lizarann. I carried her off to Miss Fossett's—with her aunt's consent, of course. The poor little

woman had had a bad time, you see. She wanted consolation badly after your accident, and not being able to come to you. And her aunt's a good woman, but . . ."

"She ain't that sort of good woman . . . t'other sort!"

"Well, perhaps! Anyhow, I made her wrap Lizarann up, and trotted her off to the School. Miss Fossett's got her there now, and she's in good hands. . . ."

"You mustn't spin it out too long, Taylor." Thus the Doctor's voice, as his footsteps stop by the bed-end. He comes to the other side of the bed, and lays his finger on the near pulse. "Magnificent constitution! Everything in his favour! Splendid case—pity to spoil it! Give you seven minutes more by the clock. Look in to say good-bye as you go." He is gone, and Jim is conscious of the slight rustle of a nurse, on the watch to pounce, hard by.

"I must tell you what I came for, Coupland. Of course I wanted to find how you were, and take back word to Lizarann." Mr. Taylor has to speak quickly. "But I wanted to ask something of you."

"Give it a name, master!"

"I wanted to ask your consent to our keeping her—I should say to Miss Fossett keeping her—at the School till you are about again. She shall be well cared for. I know I am asking you to trust . . ." He stopped; Jim's lips were moving.

"You're the School-lady's brother, belike?"

"Not quite, but that sort of thing! Her brother and I were at College together. He is doing my work in the country, and I am doing his at St. Vulgate's at Clapham."

"That parson-gentleman—he'd be her brother. Him I heard cough?" For the brother and sister, interested in Lizarann, had visited Tallack Street, and interviewed Jim.

"Him you heard cough. That's it!"

"But *he* can't do no work, poor chap!—not work in the country."

"My work in the country is the same as his in London. Only not so hard. And the country air does his cough good."

"Oh, master!—ye never mean to say *you're* a parson!" Jim's voice rises with the poignancy of his disappointment. To him, every cleric is the Rev. Wilkinson Wilkins, the spiritual adviser of Aunt Stingy.

"I'm not a very bad one, Coupland. At least, I hope not." There is humility in the speaker's tone, and recognition of the aggressive and objectionable character of Cures of Souls, but a germ of a good-humoured laugh buried in it. The seven minutes are near their end, and the nurse, considered as a rustle, is increasing. She means action in a moment.

"I'll be your bail for that, master." But Jim cannot quite conceal his disappointment. He had formed such a high ideal of his visitor. Still, he can and does show his faith in him by spending the rest of his available speech-strength on a few words of gratitude to Lizarann's protectors, and assenting without conditions to the proposed arrangement. But when will he be "about again"? The nurse throws eight weeks, somehow, into her expression, without speech, and the forgiven parson interprets for the blind man's hearing.

"Quite a month, Coupland. But I will bring your little girl to see you the moment the doctors will allow me. Now, good-bye!"

Alas, poor Yorick! He had been so enjoying his company—company that had neither respect for his cloth, nor contempt for his cloth, nor indifference to his cloth; that, in fact, knew nothing about his cloth—and rejoicing in Jim's free speech, that would have been cramped here and crimped there had the speaker known he was addressing a parson-gentleman. It was like stepping back into the old days before he took clerk's orders; days when he was still uninsulated, still one with his kind. And yet there was never a man with a more earnest belief in his inherited mission to fight the Devil in any of the half-score of Churches that look askant at one another, and waste good powder and shot over the creeds their congregations shout in unison, knowing all the while that one or more of the chorus may be—must be—uttering a lie. Athelstan Taylor had donned the cloth he wore simply because it was the uniform of his territorial regiment in the army that, as he conceived, was being for ever enrolled in the service of Ormuzd against Ahrimanes. In his enthusiasm to fight beneath the banner of his division of the army, the Cross, he had ridden roughshod over a hundred scruples on petty details; and the consequence was that his most earnest admirers were often fain to shake their heads over his lawless expressions of opinion on sacred subjects, and to lament that Taylor, with so many fine points in his character, should be on vital points of Doctrine so painfully unsound. It was an open secret on the part of both Augustus Fossett and his sister that they prayed for Athelstan; the former with a belief as real as he was capable of that the wanderer would be guided; the latter with a practical misgiving that a very large number of thoughtful persons had *not* been guided, or so many samples would not be to be found outside the Communions of the English—and Roman—Churches. For too many of her brother's idols had "gone over" for it to be possible to pool the latter in the sum total of orthodox, heterodox, and cacodox dissidents. Of which last, in connection with this

brother's and sister's petitions to the Almighty to guide Athelstan into their way of thinking, the one they preferred to call Socinianism was the most poisonous and insidious. A creed baited with mere veracities, to get a bite from the unwary!

As for Athelstan, every time he came to take his friend's burden off his shoulders in London he felt more clearly than before how apt he was to lose sight of even Ormuzd and Ahriman in a blind struggle against the brutalism and debauchery, and filth and disease, of a London outskirt well up to its date. Encouraged at first by the tidiness of the last-built bee-lines of bricks and mortar, he had half hoped a compromise was being found between purchasing a sense of Christianity for the rich at the cost of indefinite multiplication of the poor, and passing sentence of death on those unable to enjoy living on nothing, or to give anything in exchange for something. But as soon as he began to get behind the scenes his poorer parishioners were enacting, he saw and heard every day things that had dashed his hope; and by the time of the story had quite come to the conclusion that the small population whose souls he was supposed to be looking after were as vicious as the Court of Charles the Second, and so idle as to affirm the right of male mankind to sixteen hours out of twenty-four to eat, drink, sleep, and do nothing in—slight exceptions to the last, to nobody's credit, being allowed for. Of course it was an exaggerated feeling on Athelstan's part; one thing was that he could not reconcile himself to the ubiquitous *fœtor* of the beer in which, speaking broadly, his flock —who didn't acknowledge him as their shepherd at all—lived and moved and had their being. Under exasperation, he thought of them in that way . . . and forgave them!

Miss Fossett interrupted a reverie to this effect, by saying to him, as he arrived, after striding five miles in an hour through the slush and drizzle: "I've had to put that child to bed."

"Hullo!—nothing bad, I hope?" What a damper! And he had looked forward so to the small anxious face, and the consolation he was going to give it. All his clients were not so nice as Lizarann.

"Dr. Ferris said he wasn't sure if it was pleurisy. It might be pneumonia."

"Doctor's been, then?"

"Oh yes!—I sent for him. She's been poulticed ever since."

"Hope it's all a fuss about nothing."

"I hope so. Here's a visitor, Lizarann. Now don't you jump up!"

CHAPTER XVI

BREAKFAST IN GROSVENOR SQUARE. STRAINED RELATIONS OF TWO SISTERS. A BATTLE INTERRUPTED. SAMARIA A GOOD-NATURED PLACE. WHO WAS TO PAY?

In a town-house of the Arkroyd order, a certain dramatic interest attaches to the morning meal that is not shared by any later one. Nobody knows who will come down to breakfast, except perhaps some confidential lady's-maid; and *she* won't tell, as often as not. So that the knights-harbingers of fresh toast and tea and coffee can always enjoy a little sport in the way of wagers as to who will take which, and which of the young ladies will be up—or down, which is the same thing—before ten. The pleasurable excitement which those who play cards feel, before they pick their packs up and know the worst, is akin to theirs, only less. Because the cards may be snapped up the moment it isn't a misdeal; while the tension is prolonged for the watcher who speculates beside a well-laid table as to whether the methylated will last out under the urn till one of the ladies appears to make tea, or will sputter and fizz and have to be taken out and refilled, and very likely the wick too short all the time!

Lunch is different. People make a point of lunch, or else declare off, and don't come home at all. Those who do not comply with this rule are Foolish Virgins—and serve them right! Our own experience, an extended one, points to the impossibility of being too late for breakfast. There may be a case—but! . . .

Anyhow, the same human interest does not attach to the question of who is, or isn't, coming to lunch. And as for tea, nobody cares a brass farthing; because you can get tea somewhere else. On the other hand, dinner is a serious matter, and you must make your mind up; and either come, or not.

This tedious excursion into the ethics of Breakfast is all owing to everybody coming down so late at 101, Grosvenor Square, on the morning after the last chapter. The story is, as it were, kept waiting, and may as well indulge in a few reflections. Samuel, the young man who brought the chessboard at Royd, had to wait, and

seemed able to do so without change of countenance. He very likely reflected, for all that.

It may have struck Samuel, when Miss Arkroyd made her appearance first of those expected by him, that when this young lady said, "Oh, nobody!" on entering, she did not seem sorry, and picked up her share of the morning's post from her plate to read nearer the fire quite resignedly. It was getting colder again, and folk were pledging themselves not to wonder if the wind were to go round to the north.

Judith looked at the outside of her mother's and sister's letters. Sibyl's interested her most; and she looked them all through carefully, numerous though they were. Why does one look at the directions on other people's letters? So Judith thought to herself, as she got disgusted with the monotony of the text on Sibyl's, and her inability to suggest any emendations. She was very honourable, for she read nothing but a signature or two on the numerous postcards. She was, in fact, only acting under the impulse which prompts the least inquisitive of us all, when we have undertaken to post a letter for a friend, to read the address upon it carefully before we insert it into the inexorable box, and feel inside to see that it hasn't stuck. Judith did not answer the question she asked herself; yet her reading of the same address again and again called more for explanation than that of the letter-poster; for the latter may be put on his oath in the end, if a letter fails to reach.

There were so many to "Miss Sybil Arkroyd" that she had become confused over the spelling of the name by the time its owner's footstep was heard on the stairs. However, she wasn't going to pretend she hadn't been reading them. "There's one for you from Betty Inglis," she said incidentally; and picking up her own letters from the table, took them with her to read by the fire. It was a morning to make the hardiest give in to the temptation of a hundred-weight of best Wallsend, blazing. Judith enjoyed it; so much so that a sense of a russet Liberty serge, baking, crept into the atmosphere as she sought in vain for an inlet into an envelope cruelly gummed to its uttermost corner. When will envelope-makers have compassion for their customers' correspondents?

"You're scorching, Ju. Or you will be directly." So spoke Sibyl, reading a letter attentively, and speaking through her absorption as to a world without. "Who was that? . . . No—don't make the tea yet, Elphinstone. Coffee for me. You're coffee, I suppose, Ju? . . ."

"Yes, coffee. Who was what?"

"Who was that in your cab last night? . . . Well, you made

noise enough! Of course I could hear! I'm not deaf." The letter is read by now, being short, and Sibyl has come out into the world to hear the answer to her question.

But Judith is deep in half-a-quire of illegibility, after an episode of a fork-point, and some impatience. "It's an old dress," she says, and then ignores Sibyl altogether for a term, in favour of the letter. Her eyebrows had moved in connection with the cab-inquiry, up to the point of detection by a sharp younger sister. "I had no cab, dear," she says at last. "I came in Mr. Challis's cab." This is quite a long time after.

"Has Mr. Challis a cab?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Sib."

Sibyl knows, but has become absorbed in a second letter. So she leaves her tongue, as her representative, to say fragmentarily, "Hansom-cab off the rank," and then retires altogether into the letter for a moment. However, she comes out presently to say, "The question is, was it Mr. Challis? I suppose it was, though, or it couldn't have been Mr. Challis's cab . . . oh no!—I'm not finding fault. It's all perfectly right as far as I'm concerned."

The respectable domestics have been in momentary abeyance, and the conversation has been more suggestive than it would have been in their presence. The reappearance of Mr. Elphinstone, with the gist of two breakfasts, causes an automatic adjournment of the subject. The day's appointments make up the talk, during his presence.

But so late was the quorum of the total breakfast—in fact, it was doubtful whether two of the constituent cujusses would appear at all—that Sibyl got ample opportunity for resuming the conversation exactly where it left off, at least a quarter-of-an-hour having elapsed.

"It's all perfectly right as far as I'm concerned," she repeated. "As long as Marianne doesn't mind!" The Christian name may have been an intentional impertinence.

"There is nothing for Marianne to mind, Sibyl."

Sibyl changes her ground unscrupulously. "It doesn't matter to me as long as *I'm* not his wife. But a hansom-cab is a hansom-cab, and you know it as well as I do."

"I know it, dear." Judith speaks serenely. The attack is too puerile to call for resentment. "They try one's nerves and destroy one's skirts, getting in and out."

Sibyl's style has not been worthy of her Square, or Mr. Elphinstone. There was too much of the lowlier air of Seven Dials in the suggestion that a hansom-cab would promote an irregular

flirtation to do more than provoke a smile. Charlotte Eldridge, even, would have condemned it as the bald scoff of inexperience.

But there was more maturity and force in Sibyl's next speech. "I want to know, are you going to tell the *madre* about it or not?" Judith flushed angrily as she answered her with: "I have told you, Sibyl, that as soon as there is something to tell, I will tell it at once to anyone it concerns. Mamma certainly!"

"How far has it gone?—that's what I want to find out."

"How far has what gone?"

"You needn't look so furious, Ju. Do let's talk quietly. You know perfectly well what I mean. This talk about a trial-performance." The imputation that Judith looked furious was a sporting venture. No doubt she felt furious, thought Sibyl, and how was she to know she didn't show it?

"I told you days ago there was no talk of a trial-performance."

Sibyl restrained herself visibly—too visibly for the prospects of peace. After some thirty seconds of self-command, she reworded her question mechanically. "The talk about something that was not to be a trial-performance." The forms of the court were complied with, without admission of previous lack of clearness. This was shown in a *parti pris* of facial immobility. A licked lip, a scratched nose, an eye-blink, would have marred its dramatic force.

"You needn't look so stony over it, Sib. There's no mystery of any sort, and I can tell you about it in three words. Alfred Challis is anxious . . . what?"

"Nothing—go on!"

"Mr. Challis is anxious that I should get up enough of Aminta Torrington's part to give Mr. Magnus an idea . . . No!—Sibyl. Mr. Magnus is *not* vulgar, and *I* think him picturesque. He smokes too many very large cigars perhaps, and they don't improve his complexion. But what objection there can possibly be to diamond shirt-studs . . ."

Sibyl interrupted. "You may just as well tell it all out, Ju. What do you mean by 'enough'?"

"What do I mean by enough? Do be intelligible, Dandelion dear!" Judith is patronizing.

"I wish you wouldn't call me by that hatefully foolish name. Yes—what do you mean by 'enough'? Does it mean that what Mr. Magnus has heard of what you can do *isn't* enough? That doesn't mean that he's heard nothing. And you know he hasn't."

Sibyl is really no match for her sister in the long run, and perhaps this is a sample of it—of a run long enough for her to get ruffled in. Judith's forbearance becomes exemplary. "Listen

while tell I you," she says, imputing impatience, "what Mr. Magnus *has* heard; and then you can talk about it."

"Very well, go on!" snappishly.

"The suggestion came from Mr. Magnus. Afred Challis . . . certainly!—it's his name. Don't be absurd. . . . Alfred Challis may have talked to him—no doubt has—of my fitness for the part. And yesterday between the acts he asked us into his room, and made us read one of the scenes. Of course I was Aminta, and Alfred Challis was Moorsom. It was where they meet for the first time at the oculist's at Vienna, in the waiting-room. . . ."

"Is that the kissing scene?"

"The kissing scene! Sibyl!—I'm sorry you read that manuscript. . . ."

"You shouldn't have left it lying about."

"It was in my bedroom, child. . . . Well!—it certainly wasn't what you choose to call the kissing scene . . . but it doesn't matter. I don't believe I should ever be able to make you understand how purely *professional* it all was. Mr. Magnus sat on the arm of a chair smoking, with his thumbs in his waistcoat, and said that sort of thing wouldn't go down with the public." Judith omitted Mr. Magnus's reason, which was that it wasn't half "schick" enough, thick enough; for it wasn't clear which he said, as his tongue interfered with his articulation.

Sibyl listened, chafing. When no more seemed to be coming, she elected to treat the communication as a confession forced from reluctant lips. "You see I was right, after all," she said. "And it *was* Mr. Challis in the cab." The discontinuity of semi-accusation was bewildering, and refutation hung fire for a moment. She ran on, giving her sister no chance. "I really must say, Judith, that I do not understand you at all. But you must go your own way. Do you suppose—can you suppose—that *any* member of your family would approve of what is going on, if they knew it?"

At this point the fact that Judith is really much the cooler of the two tells. "I don't know whom you mean, Sib," she says temperately, "by *they*. No member of my family is plural, that I know of . . . well!—it isn't grammar, according to me. However, if you mean the *madre*, we shall very soon see; that is, if the thing doesn't turn out a flash in the pan. I shall tell her all about it at the proper time. . . ."

"Meanwhile, hold my tongue, you mean? I'm not at all sure, Judith, that any other sister in my place wouldn't at once tell her mother all she knew about such goings on. . . ."

"What are the goings on? I know of no goings on."

"I do. This visit to the back slums of a theatre, alone; I mean unaccompanied by any other lady. The impropriety—yes! impropriety—of the whole thing. . . ."

"Please don't make a scene, with Elphinstone every half-minute, and mamma just coming down. I never said we were alone. If you had asked me, I should have told you that Mrs. Eldridge was with us."

"Who's Mrs. Eldridge?"

"A very nice person, a friend of Marianne Challis. Her husband's in the Post Office. Madame Louise could dress her to look almost pretty, if her complexion were better. And *propriety*—oh dear!—the very pink! She rather bored me, in fact, because she wouldn't let it alone."

"And was this Mrs. Ostrich—or whatever her name is—satisfied?"

"Perfectly. She has known Alfred Challis since before his first wife died, and has the most absolute confidence in him."

"I don't fancy your Mrs. Ostrich. Where was Mr. Challis's wife all this time? . . . well!—this deceased wife's sister, anyhow."

"Sibyl! I won't talk to you. Marianne Challis was where we left her, in the stage-box. I don't suppose she left it, but I didn't ask her."

"And then did she and Mrs. Ostrich go home separately?"

"Eldridge. Marianne Challis and she went away together. They were not going home; Wimbledon's too far, where they are. I really don't know where they are staying."

"I'm not curious. But you and Mr. Challis drove home lovingly in a hansom, after acting lovers in a play! There!—you needn't fly out. . . ."

Was it any wonder that Judith then lost her temper? For she had not flown out. The insinuation that she would do so was based on Sibyl's knowledge that she would have been perfectly justified in doing so. But now, she did lose her temper, subject to that disguise of self-command which tells for more than any outburst.

"You are taking too much on yourself, Sibyl. Mamma knows. At least, she knows Alfred Challis and his wife. They have dined here, and we agreed—mamma and I—to know nothing about the deceased wife's sister business. It may even be false from beginning to end. . . . *Ask* her, did you say? I should never dream of doing so. . . . And as for your other disgraceful—yes! disgraceful—speech just now . . ."

"Well—it's true! You *had* been, and you know you had."

"Had been what?"

"Acting Moorhouse and Aminta Dorrington."

"That's not the way you put it. But I don't care about that. It's only your silliness and inexperience makes you say these things. . . ."

"What is it you do care about, then?"

"I won't submit to be catechized, Sibyl. But I'll tell you. I do care about what the *madre* thinks—and papa. And I shall tell *her*. . . . I wonder who that can be?"

The "that" in question was a knock at the front door, one that expressed confidence that it was at the right house, and even that it would find someone at home—well-founded confidence in both cases. For the Miss Arkroyds, listening for the identity of the abnormal visitor—at ten o'clock in the morning!—only wait for a barely perceptible instalment of voice and footstep to exclaim jointly: "The Rector . . . just fancy—what can he want? . . . In here, Elphinstone!" And it may be neither is sorry for the interruption. How very frequently a visitor is the resolution of a family discord! Judith, pale with suppressed anger, recovers her colour. Sibyl's flush of excitement dies.

It is the Rector of Royd, no doubt of that! And something equivalent to a breeze of fresh air, or the tide in an estuary, or the new crackle of a clean pine-wood fire—but not exactly any one of the three—comes into the room with him and his laugh. He has an effect that is usual with him. The under-housemaid, who has passed him on to Mr. Elphinstone, hopes she won't have done dusting when he comes out. Mr. Elphinstone is seriously hurt at his having breakfasted three hours ago and now refusing food, which would have promoted their intercourse; and the young ladies are not sorry, on inquiry, to hear that her ladyship is not coming down, but will have her breakfast upstairs, because thereby they will have the Rev. Athelstan all to themselves longer.

However, they chorus sorrow which they don't feel about their mother; and affect an equally hypocritical satisfaction at a probable appearance of their father, which they don't believe in.

"You'll see papa will come in presently and say he never heard the bell." Thus Judith, who shows her pack by adding: "Now do let's talk and be comfortable till he comes." All right—*nem. con.!*

"I think you the most profligate and dissipated family in London and Westminster. . . . Come nearer the fire? Not if I know it. Both you girls are scorching. . . . Well now! What was it last night?"

"They went to 'Ibsen.'" Judith summarizes, abruptly. Sibyl says: "And you went to the Megatherium," rather as a counter-accusation than a contribution of fact. The visitor looks quickly from the one to the other. Whatever he notes, he passes it by.

"I've been to 'Ibsen,'" he says, "and know all about it. The people commit suicide. What was the other play?"

"A stupid thing. I really hardly made out what it was about. But the author's a friend of the people I went with. You remember Mr. Challis, Mr. Taylor? I brought him to tea at the Rectory."

"Of course. I thought him such a shy customer. But I met him after that. We had quite a chat."

"Oh yes—I remember he talked about it to me. I'm afraid you found him a great heathen."

"Absolutely." Mr. Taylor laughs cheerfully over Alfred Challis's heathenism. "But a very good Christian for all that. I shouldn't say so to the Bishop, though. He never came to church, and I wasn't sorry. . . ."

"Do take care, Mr. Taylor. We shall tell the Bishop."

". . . Not on his account, you know—on my own. He would have convicted me of plagiarism. I took all his ideas for my sermon."

This was incidental chat, leading to nothing. Then followed inquiry, overdue, about the Rector's establishment, especially his *locum tenens* at Royd, the reporting of whom brought disquiet to his face. His hearers knew he was making the best of it; he was not a good actor. This led naturally to conversation about his own temporary *locus tenendus* in his friend's behalf, and so to the miserable tragedy of the drunkard's death in the canal-lock. Now it was well over four months since either young lady had done any slumming in the Tallack Street quarter: indeed, their visits there soon lost the charm of novelty, so neither recollected its inhabitants off-hand. The description failed to identify, until Mr. Taylor mentioned the unhappy Uncle Bob by name, first heard by him at the inquest. Then a recollection struck Judith.

"That must have been the man that said he was 'mine truly, Robert Steptoe,'" said she. "How very shocking!" The horror of the story of course increased tenfold the moment a *nexus* was established. Reminiscence, at work in Sibyl's mind, caused her to strike in upon Mr. Taylor's continuation of his narrative; on which he arrested it to hear what she was going to say. She said: "Never mind, go on!" till pressed to take her turn first; then said: "Wasn't that the blind beggar and the little girl—the same family, I mean?"

"Exactly. I was just coming to them." And then the Rev. Athelstan proceeded with a full account of poor Jim's sad plight in the Hospital, and of how the little girl had been a great source of anxiety to Addie Fossett. He contrived to assign the whole of the activities on Lizarann's behalf to that lady; having, indeed, a most happy impersonal faculty of narration, which detailed the facts without his own connection with them.

"They are really the reason of my coming here this morning," said he in conclusion. "I dare say you have both been wondering what it was all about. However, it's that. This poor fellow, Jim Coupland, oughtn't to be allowed to sell matches in the streets. And although he makes a good deal by what is really begging in disguise . . ."

"He makes three times what he would at any trade." Sibyl speaks positively; she always knows things.

"But he's putting it all by for the child." The clergyman justifies Jim, promptly.

"Please go on with what you were saying, Mr. Taylor!" Judith speaks. "'Although he makes a good deal by what is really begging in disguise' . . ."

"He might be dissuaded from it even if the loss of his foot—poor fellow!—should make it more lucrative."

"I don't see how." This is Sibyl, naturally. The Rector makes a mental note that she is always in opposition. Her sister says nothing, and he resumes:

"You remember the story of the *asker?*" Sibyl remembers it with a snap, and "Of course!—go on!" Judith, more slowly, thinks she remembers, and then—oh yes!—she remembers now. The speaker continues: "You know the child isn't seven, and doesn't the least realize about her father. She has been indoctrinated from babyhood with a false idea of some employment he has; he's as professional to her as the turncock or lamplighter. But he—poor chap!—is most anxious she should never know the truth. Yesterday he consented to not seeing the child for another six weeks—although he's longing for her, day and night—because he wants to spare her the knowledge of his stump. He's convinced that a wooden leg will be a great joke between them, and is devising shifts by which it may be concealed from his 'little lass,' as he calls her, that it is ever taken off. And yesterday, after swearing me, as it were, into the conspiracy for the child's deception, he ended up with an earnest request that I would never 'let on' about his being a 'cadging varmint.' I pointed out to him the utter uselessness of the attempt, and that it must fail in the end, and that the longer the

knowledge is put off, the more painful it will be when it comes. I suspect he would give it up, to spare her. But he would have to be provided for, somehow."

"Have to be!" Sibyl's tone suggests impatient protest against Jim's case being made a claim on Society. The whole duty of a Christian includes a liberal amount of slumming; but it must be distinctly understood to be Christianity, not bald equity. Athelstan Taylor didn't feel analytical on the subject. He knew he would have "had to" cross the road between Jerusalem and Jericho if he had happened to come up before the Samaritan, or else that he would have been miserable all night about the man that had fallen among thieves and come to grief. He was like that at school, you see. Such an awfully good-natured chap! Probably Samaria was an awfully good-natured place. Anyhow, he didn't see his way to discussing the point this morning. He made a concession:

"Well—suppose we say it would be a pleasure to do it! You would feel it so if you knew the child. Really that infant's pluck when that poor madman was flourishing that horrible knife about . . ."

"But you didn't tell us about that." Both ladies speak. Indeed, Mr. Taylor had slurred over a great deal of his adventure, merely saying he was passing the house and had given what assistance he could, with very little detail till he got to Uncle Bob's escape.

"I never saw such a courageous child in my life. Addie Fossett's got her at the Schoolhouse now. She got a bad chill that night, and we've been very uneasy about her. Perhaps we are both of us given to fidgeting about coughs and temperatures and things. However!" This isolated word expresses, as briefly as possible, dismissal of the subject as material for depression, with retention of it as stimulus to action.

Judith is only languidly interested. "What do you think of doing, Mr. Taylor?" she says absently. Her mind is on the playhouse, yesterday.

"I'm not very clear about details, but if Jim will be tractable, and do as he's told, there ought to be some arrangement possible. He admits that he has some money in the savings-bank, and the Carriers' Co. that ran over him . . . yes!—I've seen the manager . . . are inclined to be liberal in the matter of compensation; and then there's . . ." Here a hesitation comes in.

"There's papa, of course." Both ladies agree about their parent, as a sort of *fons et origo nummorum*. Mr. Taylor had better talk to him about it. Mr. Elphinstone, after thirty-five years in the family, has no scruple about showing that he overhears conversa-

tion, and subinforms Miss Arkroyd that Sir Murgatroyd is imminent. Pending the baronet, the conversation is general, then drifts towards the Great Idea. Sibyl becomes gracious—points with pride to a mountain of letters on the subject that she will have to answer before she goes out. Mr. Elphinstone has restricted them to a clear spot on the breakfast-table, without presuming to fold or envelope. Miss Arkroyd detracts from their glory. Most of them are from artists who want to make designs for the cripples to execute, or from cripples who can do nothing at present, but would take three-and-sixpence a week during apprenticeship. Sibyl is indignant. The letters are the *exact contrary* of what Judith alleges. It is easy to sneer, but read what Mr. Brewdover says. There's his letter! But Judith says she isn't prepared to take up her parable on the subject—doesn't know enough about the matter. No doubt it's all right! She withdraws an incipient yawn, and Sibyl says something *sotto voce,* possibly that Judith might just as well have held her tongue.

Athelstan Taylor, writing of this interview to his friend Gus later, said: "I was glad at this point that the Bart. came in, apologetic—as I didn't fancy having to make peace between those two girls. Why need well-brought-up young women to be so quarrelsome—without the excuse of Alcoholism? They are rather a disappointment—those two—they used to be so nice as kids. I must say the old boy is my favourite of the family still—he was quite exemplary about this poor sailor chap—said, if *I* was convinced, that was enough for him, and I had only to say how much would be wanted. Her ladyship was very good too—do her justice! —promised to come and see poor Jim at the Hospital; and I think will keep her promise." He added a postscript next day: "Lady Arkroyd's visit came off this morning, and passed off without ructions. I was rather nervous, because her ladyship thinks it her duty to get up a sort of theologico-ethico-moral-goody steam *because I'm there*—and poor Jim is such a terrible and appalling example of theoretical irreligion that I was on tenterhooks."

CHAPTER XVII

LADY ARKROYD'S VISIT TO JIM. GOODY TALK. JIM AND HIS MAKER. HOW MR. TAYLOR VISITED ANOTHER CASE. A DEATH-BED CONFESSION

THE reference to Jim's irreligious attitude, in the Rector's letter, makes it almost incumbent on the story to give some particulars of Lady Arkroyd's visit to the Hospital.

Athelstan Taylor, of course, came to his appointment to the minute. He always preferred to do the waiting himself if he could spare the time, and he usually found something to avert tedium. On this occasion, seeing no sign, when he arrived at St. Brides, of the Arkroyd pair of bays, or the dark chestnuts with starred foreheads—both well known to him—he made short excursions into the neighbourhood, hoping each time to just catch Lady Arkroyd on her arrival when he returned.

He made three such excursions, amounting in all to half an hour. The first and longest was made so by his lighting on a fight between two small boys, which he felt bound to interrupt. But not at the very earliest; it was such a good fight, and the two pugilists and their friends were enjoying it so. So he spun out his approach as much as possible, and then pounced with, "Why aren't you two at school, hey?" They looked at each other, and at him, as their friends did also, but could not agree on a reason. Then they said, "Let's go down the lyne," and fled, carrying jackets, to begin again as soon as possible. Pursuit down the lane did not seem to come into practical politics.

The second excursion was shorter, and he was sorry he could not spare time for more conversation with a purveyor of tortoises, who was offering them to the public from a truck. Why should the trade in tortoises flourish in South London? Why tortoises at all? He could not stop to learn; and when he found that her ladyship was still in arrear, he started back to find the tortoise-monger, but failed to do so. On his return this time, he thought it best to step into the Hospital and get a few words with his friend the House Surgeon, to whom he had sent a card overnight. It was all right, said that gentleman, about the dressers. They had nearly done by now, and Jim's case had been made a point of—was quite ready

for visitors; nothing doing now till the visiting surgeon came—in an hour and a half about. Mr. Taylor, reassured, went out again to meet her ladyship, and presently saw the carriage coming down the street. In a very short time he was telling Jim he had brought a lady to see him.

"It's mighty kind of you, master. And it's mighty kind o' the lady. I'm not so fit to see company as I might be." He did not mean he could not see; for he always forgot his blindness. He referred entirely to his uncourtly *entourage*.

"We mustn't trouble about that," said her ladyship, and really didn't mean to be condescending. "I shall sit here, Mr. Taylor. Where will you come?" *Here* being the chair beside the bed. Mr. Taylor wouldn't sit down; indeed, it was easier to stand, as long as Jim kept his hand, which he did not seem inclined to let go.

"Tell this lady about your accident, Jim."

"Oh, do, please! I should so like to hear." This was true, and opened up an avenue of respite to a feeling of her ladyship's that she ought to say something good, if it was only about how we should bow to the will of an All-wise Providence. She had got that ready in the carriage coming through Old Bond Street, and had felt quite sure she should think of something better presently, and hadn't succeeded. So she was glad of a pause, to think in. Besides, it was interesting.

"There's none so much to tell about it, lady; you might put it all inside of a minute, in the manner o' speaking. Ye see, I never see this van coming along—never took note, I should say!—more by token I was listening like to hear the voice of my little lass call 'Pilot'—a kind of divarsion we make out between us, me and the lassie . . . you'll understand? . . ."

"I quite understand. Your little lass is the child I have seen at Miss Fossett's Schoolroom. Little Eliza Ann."

"Belike you have, lady. She's Lizarann, sure! Well, this here van come along in the dark, and there was I mazed like, by reason of not finding the granite curb. It come with a nasty rush, and I had no way on me to steer clear, set apart the want of sea-room. But I'm a bit uncertain how it come about, there's the truth of it!" Jim paused, and felt for an expression, probably one akin to loss of presence of mind; then ended with, "In a quick turn about o' things, you don't easy come by the time to get your considerin' cap on. But it was no fault of any man, as I see it."

Lady Arkroyd saw an opportunity. "It was the will of Providence," she said. There could be no harm in that, although her

clerical friend had cautioned her that Jim's mind was not an easy one to deal with on religious lines. But Jews, Turks, Heretics, and Infidels innumerable could have subscribed to this, surely. Jim only said, with the most perfect simplicity: "I wouldn't wish to fix the blame, with any confidence. It was just a chance, as I see it." Her ladyship did not catch the exact tenor of the remark, and did not see the amused, benevolent smile on the face of the big man who still stood looking down on Jim, holding his hand as he would have held a child's.

The fact was that, on one of the two or three occasions when the Rev. Athelstan had referred—but quite colloquially, and without any idea of taking a mean advantage of Jim's helplessness—to the Almighty as the responsible agent in the matter, Jim had taken up the theological position that if God hadn't "cut in," he—Jim—might have been still the strong seaman on the great free sea, might have actually *seen* his little lass! Dolly must have died, of course—"my wife, seven year agone, master," said Jim. "Because a many on us may die, any time"—but that was another matter. At least, why need both his eyes go? "Ah, master!" said he, when it was settled that if God had done one job, he'd done the other, "why couldn't he leave me just no more than a quarter-allowance of one of them—just for to see my wife and the little lass together, what time there was for it?" Perhaps it was part of the Rector of Royd's unsoundness that he almost lost sight of Jim's anthropomorphism—the naïveté of his presentment of his Maker as a meddlesome old plague—in the heartbroken voice that could still speak about the eyes that could no longer see, about the child his touch and hearing alone could tell him of. Part of that unsoundness, too, maybe, that he resolved thenceforward to make no attempt to change Jim's views, except by hypnotic suggestions, or their equivalent! No crop could grow on land so foully manured! Better to leave it to the wild-flowers for a season.

He certainly thought he saw an improvement of Jim's feelings towards this strange deity of his conception, in this readiness to exonerate him, or it, and to lay the blame on the metaphysico-religious scapegoat, Chance. It was manifested in the tone of his voice, one of willingness to spare even an author of mischief—maybe a well-intentioned blunderer—and to find an insensitive back to flagellate in his place.

"The merest chance, I am sure!" Lady Arkroyd welcomed the scapegoat, and the Rev. Athelstan looked more amused than ever, under the skin. The lady never suspected herself of any absurdity. "But Sir Murgatroyd says the matter ought to be gone into, and

proper inquiries made." The Baronet had done so, certainly; but may be said to have been left speaking, like M.P.'s when a reporter packs off an instalment of shorthand *in mediis rebus*. "Of course, if there was any doubt about the driver of the van being sober at the time . . ."

Jim showed anxiety on the carman's behalf. "He mightn't be any the worse driver for that, lady," he said. "It was the sart o' night a pint or so don't go far on, to keep the life in a man."

"Jim won't grudge him that much, on such a night, Lady Arkroyd. But Sir Murgatroyd's quite right, of course! However, as a matter of fact, the whole thing has been thoroughly sifted, and it seems certain drink had nothing to do with it, this time."

"Not likely, master! Didn't the pore feller make a shift to get over here a'ter work hours—took a night-turn all the way from Camden Road goods station—so they told me—just for to hear the end of the story? And the follerin' night? So they *said*, and I'm tellin' ye all I know. In coorse, I never seen him, myself!"

"No—of course you could not." Lady Arkroyd's pity for Jim's blindness, which *his* speech ignored, is mistaken by him for regret at the stringency of visiting regulations. The feeling of compassion in her voice seems to him only man's natural resentment against rules, interpreted by womanly sensibility.

"I'll see him one o' these days, lady," Jim says consolatorily. Of course, he means in the days of the wooden leg to come, if not sooner. Her ladyship, still conscious of the desirability of a religious atmosphere, has some vague impression that Mr. Taylor has been guaranteeing Jim eyesight on a cloud, through the whole of an exasperating Sunday lasting for ever; and she makes up her mind Jim could be read to out of the Bible with advantage, and of course there were any number of people ready to do this sort of thing. She will inquire about that. But Jim had really wanted to change the conversation to a subject nearer his heart.

"My little lass, lady!" he said. "You seen the lass once, round to the Schoolhouse. Happen you might see her again?"

"If I see Miss Fossett, Coupland, I shall certainly ask her to point out your little girl. She may not be there, you know."

"That's so, lady. But supposin'! Any guess thing you might speak about, ye know. So I was just thinkin', if you was to be so very kind as to bear in mind . . ."

"Yes. Indeed I will, Coupland. Is there something you wish I should say?"

"Well, lady, yes! And be very thankful to ye! Would ye be so very kind as just say to her . . . from her Daddy, ye know

. . . nothing at all about any sort of an ill-convenience come of this here accident. Just make it easy, like . . . for she's but young, ye'll understand. . . ."

"Jim means . . . I know, Jim"—for Jim seemed about to interrupt the Rev. Athelstan—"he means he wants Lizarann to think the accident a slight one."

"Right you are, master!" Jim is much relieved, and his interpreter continues: "So he wants her to know as little as possible till he can walk about and make the least of it."

"Oh yes! I quite understand that. I'll be very careful and discreet."

"Not for to let on, anyways, about her Daddy being a fut the less!" Jim's relief is enormous at the completeness of the understanding.

The conversation ran on, on such general lines as the diet of hospital life—highly approved of—the sanguineness of the head-surgeon that Jim would make a record in recovery, and the peculiarly small amount of inconvenience endured (if the truth were known) by the wearers of wooden legs. Jim was very cheerful about this. "Bob Steptoe, he'll lose a good half o' my custom," said he, immensely amused.

At this moment an interruption occurred. A nurse who had passed through the room a few minutes before rather hurriedly was returning, with a slightly perplexed manner on her, as of one who had not found a thing sought for. At the same moment another, who seemed a superior functionary, came in from the opposite door, and they met and spoke together in an undertone. Both looked round towards Jim's bed.

"I can ask him, anyhow!" said the senior nurse, and approached Athelstan Taylor. She spoke to him rapidly under her breath, but of what she said neither Jim nor the lady heard anything. When she had finished, he said, "Of course, certainly!" and then, turning to Lady Arkroyd, explained that a man who was dying in another part of the Hospital had asked to see a clergyman, and that an unusual conjunction of circumstances had made it difficult to comply with his request, which was urgent. He might die any moment, the nurse had said, and Mr. * * * was ill—he being, presumably, the usual resource in such cases. Mr. Taylor was sure Lady Arkroyd would excuse him. But it would be better for him to say good-bye provisionally, as no one could tell how long he might be detained. Her ladyship would no doubt stay and talk with Jim a little longer.

Lady Arkroyd was not sorry to do so. She had not quite come

up to her own standard of self-justification; having, indeed, a well-marked conviction of her capability of doing anything she turned her hands to, and certainly not least of affording consolation and help to the distressed. Without cataloguing the instances, she had an inner conviction of the existence of a class of persons who were sick, and she visited them. She was a good-natured woman enough, and really took sufficient pleasure in doing good on purpose, to make playing at Providence a luxury, or at least to prevent its ever becoming a bore. No wonder that on this occasion she felt a little damped, with nothing further to her score so far than an undertaking on her part to hold her tongue and be discreet, under specified circumstances.

"The master's coming back—the gentleman?" says Jim, as the door closes on Mr. Taylor and the nurse.

"Oh yes!—he'll come back to see you before he goes." Jim has to be satisfied with this. "You must try to keep quiet and be patient, Coupland, and then the healing will go on quicker. . . ."

"It ain't hardly impatience, lady." Jim pauses to think what it is. "Not so much as the want of a good stretch. I'd be all right if they'd take this here plaister off o' my right leg. It's a mighty thick plaister, anyhow." Jim's slight movement is terribly expressive of the irksomeness of his lot. The nurse in charge notes the fact, and contrives such alleviation as may be—an alteration in the angle of the couch, an adjustment of a pillow, a dose of some refreshing stimulant that seems not unwelcome. "He's not the trouble many are," says she. Jim seems a favourite.

Lady Arkroyd, left to herself, casts about for something to say which shall neither be aggressively religious nor too cowardly a concession to Jim's heathenism, of which Mr. Taylor has spoken freely to her. After a few more words about collateral matter, especially about the Hospital's veto on smoking—a bitter privation—she thinks she sees her way.

"It *is* very hard, Coupland, and one can't help saying so. Only, of course, it doesn't do to call the Wisdom of Providence in question. . . ."

"What might that be, missis—lady, I should say?" Now the fact is, Jim was not inquiring about the Wisdom of Providence—of which he had heard before from Mr. Wilkins—but about the meaning of "calling in question." The lady thought otherwise, mistakenly.

"I only meant," she said, feeling very unsafe, "that we know—at least, *we* believe—that events are Divinely ordered for the best."

"Ye know better than I do about that, lady," said Jim. And

then Lady Arkroyd thought he was an Agnostic. He had really only paid tribute to her superior education. But it seemed to set him a-thinking, too! For he added, after a pause: "If they'd a' been ordered for the worst, maybe I might have had my barker-pipe." The word "Divinely" had not carried his mind outside the Hospital regulations. Poor Jim had not the remotest conception that he had shocked his lady visitor.

Nevertheless, she was shocked, and felt the case called for an effort. But her own religious convictions—only she had been quite properly educated, mind you!—were few and vapid. Her proprietorship of a Prayer-Book, with a mark in the right place, nearly covered the whole ground. However, there was always the Rev. Athelstan; she could make him responsible, by indirect engineering, for any amount of belief, whatever her own unprofessional laxity might be. So she assumed a definitely religious air, and ignored Jim's unfortunate remark about the pipe.

"I feel so sure, Coupland, that Mr. Taylor has told you, and will tell you more, about Where to look, in tribulation for . . ."

"Sakes alive, Lady! *Me* look! . . ." Jim, who had interrupted, stopped suddenly, confused and perturbed at something. Her ladyship, interpreting this as some protest of Agnosticism, now felt her insufficiency to deal with the case, and only wished to transfer the conversation elsewhere. She felt she had done her duty, in what she would not have hesitated to mention in Society as "goody talk," when she executed that superb *entrechat*, so to speak, of the big initial W of "Where." She had done her duty, and had not succeeded. She would be quite justified now in relaxing from the exalted serenity, tempered with due humility, of a spiritual instructress, and referring to the minor consolations of this earth. She ignored Jim's exclamation, and continued speaking as though her last sentence had been completed.

"Besides, in a very little while you will be able to have Eliza Ann back again, and really you'll be able to move about quite easily."

Jim laughed out—a big hearty laugh of contempt for any mere personal mishap of his own. "I'll have the less weight to carry, sure!" he said. And then her ladyship looked at her watch, and asked the nurse whether that clock was right; who promptly replied that that clock was, if anything, slow. Seeing the good effect of which, she went on to say that it was slower still. However, this was not needed, for the visitor was only feeling about for departure, which, in view of the possible indefinite postponement of Mr. Taylor's return, was given up with insincere professions of

regret on the part of both, and Lady Arkroyd took her leave, consolable, but with a noble sense of duty done.

"The master *be* coming back, though, missis . . .?" Jim asks anxiously of the nurse.

"Oh, yes, he's bound to come back, and you may make your mind easy."

When Athelstan Taylor and the nurse left the ward, they passed through the avenue of beds in the adjoining ward without speaking, and into a lobby beyond. Then the nurse stopped and spoke. "This is a bad ward that we are going to. Perhaps I ought to have told you?"

"You are going there yourself?"

"It is my duty to go."

"And mine." They said no more, but no more was necessary. It was a little way further that they had to go, through wards and passages; but the circumstances did not seem to favour chat. Arriving at the door of the ward, Mr. Taylor turned and said: "This is a man, is it not—this patient—I think you said?"

"A man. The case developed in the hospital. He was brought in as sudden paralysis. He has been here a month or more."

"Do they keep cases of this sort so long?"

"Not always. They kept this one. He had an epileptic seizure which was followed by torpor. Dr. —— thinks now that the disease has affected the valves of the heart. He might die suddenly, at any moment. When I told him so to-day, he asked to see the Chaplain, Mr. ——. He and all his family have mumps."

A young doctor was in the ward, who said, "Is this the gentleman?" and after "Yes" from the nurse, continued: "You mustn't be alarmed at our precautions. We only take them in order to be on the safe side." The precautions which, it seemed, St. Bride insisted on for all who should enter a contagion-ward were a close overall of some germ-proof canvas or linen, and thin, invulnerable rubber gloves. Mr. Taylor, as he drew them on, shuddered to think how many a time, conceivably, they might have been some wearer's only safeguard against a blasted life, and the inheritance of a dire poison by generations yet unborn.

When he was safely attired in them, the young surgeon, as he conducted him through the ward, said in reply to a question: "Oh no!—not the slightest *danger* from the breath. You may be quite happy about that. Let Sister Martha put a little eau-de-Cologne on your handkerchief. This is your man."

This! This semi-mummy that is little else than bandages!

This thing, at least, only manifested to us, otherwise, as an exposed mouth; or what was a mouth and is an orifice, to be identified by two carious, projecting teeth; or as the nailless fingers of an enclosed hand, escaping from its wraps. This, it seems, is the Rev. Athelstan Taylor's man, by whom he takes a chair the nurse brings him, as he thinks to himself: "My man, thank God, not Gus's!" For his invalid friend might easily have been here in his place, and could *he*—poor delicate fellow!—have borne the awful flavour of this place, breaking through all antiseptic spray and palliation of ozone, and making him, himself, as physically sick as he is sick at heart? "Not Gus's man, thank God! At least, a great overgrown giant like myself!" So he thought as he tried to catch the words of the wretched remnant on the bed beside him. They were audible only by him, as he stooped resolutely, brushing all caution aside, and placed his ear close to the dreadful mouth. It needed an effort, even with Sister Martha's benediction on his handkerchief.

"What is my name, and who am I?" He repeats the whispered words as he hears them. "I am Athelstan Taylor, a priest in holy orders. . . . Yes—a clergyman of the Church of England . . . yes!—I understand what you say. You have something on your conscience which you wish to tell. Try and tell me."

The nurse evidently thinks the man is dying, and may die without receiving the Sacrament, which she has supposed his principal object. She makes a suggestion to that effect. But Mr. Taylor thinks otherwise. "Presently!" he says. "Let him tell his story first." The nurse retires, and the tale goes on.

It was a hard tale to catch the threads of. But its hearer was able to master the main points. The narrator had married, sixteen years before, a very young and inexperienced girl, unknown to her parents, who seemed to have remained in ignorance throughout. Even when he deserted her, a very short time after marriage, she kept her secret from everyone but a young clerk, a friend of his own, with whom, as a natural consequence, the poor girl, apparently afraid to divulge the facts to her family, became very *liée*. His story was obscure at this point, the only clear thing being that, in order to shake her off and remain free to contract another marriage, he had written a mock confession to this young man; alleging, on grounds which the dying man's condition prevented his explaining in full, that the wedding had been really a fraud, and his statement that it was so seemed to have been held sufficient by the girl. The friend, either convinced of its truth or in love with the girl himself,

had accepted it, or seemed to accept it, as indisputable. Was it to be wondered at that, when she returned to her home after an absence of some months, with nothing to show that this concealed marriage had taken place, she had accepted this young man as her lover, and married him with the full consent of her parents? The narrator had clearly foreseen this, and looked to it as a practical release from an encumbrance. His own subsequent career had been one of profligacy and crime, some of his sins being, to all appearance, far worse than this one, as such things are estimated; one achievement having, in fact, procured him a long term of penal servitude. How strange it seemed that now, with the hand of Death upon him, he should feel the lighter offence an exceptional weight upon his conscience! Yet so it was! And his hearer thought he could detect the relief the confession had given him in the changed whisper that followed the completion of his story. Mr. Taylor was glad that the atrocity that sent him to Portland Island was not specially referred to in the culprit's final inquiry—could he hope for forgiveness?

"I told the unhappy creature," wrote Athelstan to Gus, in the letter he wrote that evening, "that his chances of forgiveness must depend on the truth or falsehood of his own contrition, and I am afraid I had the cruelty to say it with some severity. You know my severe manner. But, then, it was true. I'm afraid, Gus dear, that I have hardly your faith in the efficacy of my holy office, taken by itself. But these things are awful to face. I had hardly time to fulfil my function as a priest when the poor wretch breathed his last."

It was at that last moment that the need of the rubber gloves became manifest. Just at the end, the dreadful nailless hand, moving painfully about, and fraught with some sudden strength, had caught the healthy one that lay near it on the coverlid, and drew it up to touch it with the things that had once been lips. The young doctor seemed relieved when he had himself seen the priest in holy orders well drenched in water with strange suspicions of sanitation in it, after a heart-felt lather of carbolic soap.

When the Rev. Athelstan came back to Jim's bedside, his face no longer wore its cheerful aspect of an hour ago. In that short time his sad experience—surely something more than a mere death-bed, such as his daily routine of life brought him to the sight of so often!—had changed it, and made him almost like another man.

"I'm martal glad ye've come, master," said Jim. And, at the sound of a voice with a memory in it of the chant the windlass echoes when the anchor leaves its bed in the sand, and the last

shore-boat waves God-speed to the ship set free, his hearer seemed to shake off some of the gloom that oppressed him. "I'm martal glad to see ye back," he repeats, "by token of the good lady."

Athelstan takes the hand that seeks his. "Why the good lady, Jim?" he says.

"Why, master, the good lady she says to me, she says, did I know where to look for soomat or other? Lard knows what! And I says to her, '*Me* look!' I says, because I was thinking belike this drawback on my eyesight might have slipped out of memory. . . ."

"Not very likely, Jim! But if it did, Lady Arkroyd's recollected it by now."

"Ye think so, master? But put it she hasn't! I'd be sorry she should come to the knowledge late in the day. These here ladies, master, they ain't a rough sart, like we"—this did not mean his hearer, only himself and his congeners—"and she might easy get tender-hearted what with thinkin' over. And *I'd* never be the worse, bless you!"

"*I* see what you mean, Jim." The light dawns; the speaker had been till then in the dark. He has a laugh ready for it, as he adds: "You thought the lady would be unhappy when she found she'd been talking to a blind man about his eyesight? Wasn't that it?" That was it, clearly. But Jim discerns a justification for his idea; when he learns that his blindness had been fully talked over.

"There's just what I said, in that, ye see!" says he. "The lady wouldn't be talking, not to hurt my feelings! Jim Coupland's feelings now! . . . where are we at that?" They seem to be a rare good joke to Jim. But there is material for regret in the background. "'Tain't a matter to cry one's eyes out over," says he, "but a bit of a pity, too! . . ."

"What is, Jim?"

"If I'd kept a lookout ahead, I could have steered the good lady clear of any fret about me and my eyesight. And if we'd only 'a known, I might 'a told her the starry o' the Flying Dutchman—just for entertainment like! A yarn's a yarn, master!"

Athelstan Taylor was puzzled on his way home by the curious selection of a restless conscience as aliment for disquiet. But thinking back on his own past, he found that *his* disquiets had not been about his mistakes that had most harmed others. Could he not remember his own prolonged remorse, at five years old, when an overtwist brought off the wooden leg of a minute doll, and he had the meanness to put the limb in place, and leave it, sound to all

seeming, for its owner to discover its calamity? And how he *never told!* Even now, he wished he had confessed. It was no use now! The sister that doll had belonged to had been dead thirty years, and this tale he had just heard was, so he gathered, well within the last twenty.

He was wondering that evening, after writing to Gus, whether his friend, whose place he was so glad to occupy, would not have raised some technical difficulty about the Administration of the Sacrament in rubber gloves, when a note came from his friend the House Surgeon. Had the man he had talked with given his name? It appeared that the name entered in the list of patients was an alias. Probably he had several aliases. But he had a right to be buried and registered under his last one. A line by return would do. The letter made very light of the matter—said the deceased couldn't have had any property!

Athelstan Taylor's reply was that the name given, as far as he could hear it, was Edward Kay Thorne. He walked out and posted it himself, as the servants had gone to bed. He posted at the same time his letter to his friend Gus, to which he had added a long postscript about the events of the day. "You need not think," it ended, "that I have broken the 'seal of the confessional' in telling this man's story. He said I was at liberty to do as I liked." He felt rather glad to have a sharer in such a confidence. Then he went back to his comfortable library, put coals on the fire, and sat up till one in the morning reading.

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT NASTY LITTLE STETHOSCOPE! A RETROSPECT ABOUT THE RECTOR AND MISS FOSSETT. A TRANSACTION IN KISSES. AUNT STINGY'S WEEDS, AND WHAT A GOOD COOK SHE WAS

THE dead drunkard's funeral expenses had been made conditional on his widow postponing her visit to the Hospital. No doubt the stress laid by Miss Fossett and her brother's friend on Jim's unfitness to receive visitors, was owing to their desire to justify this. It is fair to say that the woman spent the money honourably on its assigned object. She belonged to a class that expresses its emotions in the presence of Death by the celebration of obsequies, just as much as Kings and Princes—perhaps even more, considering its limitations. The classes that keep funeral ecstasies in check are to be found half-way on the human ladder, somewhere.

The object of using the power thus gained was not so much to conceal the story of the drunkard's death—for it was soon clear that Jim would not be injuriously affected by hearing of that—as to keep from him that Lizarann was the worse for her exposure in the snow on that terrible night. It appeared to Miss Fossett and the Rev. Athelstan—or Yorick, as she always called him and thought of him—that a certain amount of playing double was justified by the circumstances. It might have been a very serious throwback to Jim to know that his little lass was being kept away from him by anything but his own wish to be "on his pins again" next time he saw her; and he held on so stoically to his resolution not to see her till then that it seemed a very diluted mendaciousness to say no more of Lizarann's health than that she had caught a slight cold, and would be much better cared for at the schoolhouse than at her aunt's—unless, indeed, Jim especially wished Mrs. Steptoe to have her back. Jim didn't.

"She's such a nice little girl in herself, Yorick," said Miss Fossett a fortnight after Lady Arkroyd's visit to the Hospital, "that one wishes it could be managed." She was referring to a suggestion her ladyship had made.

"Does one, altogether?" was Yorick's reply. "What was it she

said?—'Get her away from her terrible surroundings, and give her a chance of doing well.' Our Baronetess is a good-hearted woman in reality—with a little flummery—only she's apt to be taken in by sounding phrases. This one would either mean taking the little person away from her Daddy, or else getting *him* away from *his* terrible surroundings. Who's to do it, Addie? You would shirk the task just as much as I, if you knew Jim."

"But couldn't he be got away, too?"

"Well!—of course, I was thinking of that as impracticable at the moment."

"But is it?"

"Why—no! It's only a question of money. Jim would be ductile enough, I see that. I suppose I should be right in getting Sir Murgatroyd's money used that way?"

"Certainly. He has twenty thousand a year. What does it matter? One-pound-five a week is fifty-two pounds for the pound, and thirteen pounds for the five shillings—one-fourth part. Sixty-five pounds! Oh, Yorick, what *can* it matter?"

"I don't know," says Yorick. He is one of those rare people who don't think misappropriation of funds grows less and less immoral in the inverse ratio of the one borne to them by the source of their supply.

"Well!—I *do*," says Miss Fossett. "Sir Murgatroyd can perfectly well afford it."

There was time to discuss the matter, and Yorick and Miss Fossett did so at intervals during the weeks that followed. Discussion of any project favours its materialization, which often comes about more because it is kept alive than in consequence of any agreement on details among its promoters. The idea that "something would have to be done" about Lizarann and her Daddy took root both in Grosvenor Square and the neighbourhood of Tallack Street, and only waited for Jim's wooden leg, to become a reality. It was taken for granted that Lizarann's cough, which was really hardly anything now, would be quite gone by then, and that her pulse would be normal. Six whole weeks!

Meanwhile Lizarann herself was not prepared to admit there was anything the matter with her. She secretly regarded the whole thing as a conspiracy to keep her away from her Daddy—a conspiracy somehow fostered and encouraged by Dr. Ferris's stethoscope; but not one to be denounced and rebelled against, because of the obviously good intentions of Teacher, the gentleman, and the doctor-gentleman. It wasn't *their* fault! They were misled by that audacious little lying pipe, which was no use either to play

upon or look through, and yet had the effrontery to pretend you could listen with it. Absurd!

Other forms of medical investigation she regarded as games, and resolved that when she and her Daddy were back at Aunt Stingy's, she was going to ply them gymes with Bridgetticks. She would listen to Bridgetticks's chest with a hoopstick many a day when the spring came, and weather permitted doorsteps. And *vice versa*, fair play, of course! And she would get her down flat, and put one hand on lots of different places on her chest, and thud it unfairly hard with the other, and say, "Does that hurt you?" and make her draw long breaths. She accepted diagnosis as human and lovable in benefactors, but still a weakness, and a sure road to misapprehension in chest cases.

If it had not been for cod-liver oil, and restraints, and mustard poultices that printed her small chest red, she would have regarded the whole thing as a lark, especially in view of the banquets that accompanied it. And was she not assured that Daddy was having the same, only heaps more? The oil was the worst trial. It pretended to be tasteless certainly, but that was mere pharmaceutical hypocrisy; the bottles knew better, whatever the labels might say. Her first hearing of the name of this nasty *elixir vitæ* produced a curious confusion in her mind, the revelation of which shocked Miss Fossett, taxed Yorick's command of his countenance, and made the doctor chuckle at intervals all the way home. For she recalled an occasion on which the Rev. Wilkinson Wilkins had denounced "ungodly livers." Herein lay great possibilities of misapprehension, and Lizarann was not slow to infer that cod-liver oil was divine, as opposed to some still worse abomination on draught in the opposite camp—devil-liver oil, perhaps!

The foregoing shows to what an extent Teacher had turned her residence next door to the School into a hospital for the accommodation of this case. The good-natured lady was always liable to get involved in the fortunes of any of her young students, and though the present one had no claim on her that a hundred others might not have had, she was no doubt a lovable child, and her courage under trial had fairly engaged the affections of the Rev. Athelstan. Now Yorick had always been an idol of Adeline Forsett's from the day when he was first introduced to her, a girl his junior in years, but older than he for all that, as an Eton friend to whom her favourite brother probably owed his life. She had been much in his confidence in the years that followed; had been his great friend and adviser all through his Oxford days; had sympathized with him in all his youthful love-affairs. Why it was in-

variably taken for granted that he and she were always to beat up different covers for a lifelong mate it would have been difficult to say. But so it was, and so it continued, quite to the seeming satisfaction of both. She remained his confidante during all the hesitations and perplexities of his courtship of Sophia Caldecott, while only giving a qualified approval to his choice; and when he departed, beaming, with that young lady on a wedding-tour, she honestly believed that her own burst of tears as soon as she found herself, after the day's excitement, alone with her sense that the world had got empty and chill, was due to the fact that Yorick had married, as she viewed the matter, the wrong sister—Sophia instead of Elizabeth, her great friend. Sophia was the pretty one, of course! But men were blind!

Adeline's life was so interwoven with that of a brother who, she believed, would certainly never marry that she looked on herself as not entered for the race of life at all. The idea held her with such force that she could build castles in the air for a bosom friend without a suspicion of a wish for self-election to their suzerainship. Sophia—once fourteen, and nothing—changed into a woman and captured the best castle for herself. Is it certain that Elizabeth's entry into that castle would have left Adeline's world so much less empty and chill? Who can say? All there is room to tell here is that Sophia's death came in a few years; and that Adeline's contemplation of Elizabeth's instalment as Queen Regent, without rights of coronation, was productive of involutions of thought and feeling that would have baffled Robert Browning. She was glad to believe she believed her secret grief that Yorick and Elizabeth could never be man and wife genuine. Perhaps it was.

Very likely the readiness of Miss Fossett to harbour and cherish Lizarann does not want such an elaborate explanation. Lizarann, as the story has shown, was far from being an unattractive scrap in herself, although the mouth *was* too large for beauty—no doubt of it! She was especially so in these well-washed days when Miss Fossett went after her own very early breakfast to wake her in the morning; or, if awake, to prevent her trying to get up before Dr. Ferris came.

"Maten't I go to see Daddy to-day, Teacher?" she said—always the first question—one such morning about a month after her appropriation by Miss Fossett.

"*Maten't* you—funny child! *Mayn't you*'s what you mean. No, dear, you mayn't—not yet! No till Dr. Ferris says yes. You must be a good little girl and have patience." For Miss Fossett knew children too well to weep with them invariably in their

troubles. Here was one that would bear a bracing treatment. Its effect this time was that a sob never came to maturity—was resolutely swallowed—and that the career of a couple of tears was nipped in the bud by a nightgown-sleeve. A sniff made a protest in their favour, but cut a poor figure. Courage had the best of it.

"Mustn't I only send a kiss to Daddy, Teacher?" Lizarann says this very ruefully.

"Teacer!" Miss Fossett mimics her pronunciation. "Of course you may, dear, as many as you like! You give them to me, and *I'll* see that Daddy gets them." This is very rash, as Lizarann springs like a tiger, and discharges a volley that would have kept a game of kiss-in-the-ring going for a fortnight. An evil, you will say, easily endurable by a childless woman, with perhaps a hungry heart! Agreed. But embarrassing complications followed. As soon as Lizarann, who was evidently going to be much better to-day, had disposed of a very respectable breakfast for an invalid, and was brought into good form to receive the doctor—she was very nice when she smelt of soap, was Lizarann—her mind harked back on the kissing transaction.

"Who shall you give the skisses to, to tike to Daddy?"

"Never you mind! Daddy shall get them, and that's enough for any little girl at this time in the morning. Now lie still and be good. There's Dr. Ferris's knock."

Lizarann complied. But curiosity rankled. Would Miss Fossett entrust those kisses to Dr. Ferris to give to Daddy? That was the substance of the question that came in perfect good faith from the pillow Lizarann was lying still and being good on. And this with Dr. Ferris audible below!

"Most certainly *not!* I don't know him well enough." This was very decisive; and Lizarann's impersonal mind discerned in it a mistrust of the goods reaching their destination. Dr. Ferris might give them to someone else. Another carrier must be found.

"But you do the gentleman?"

"Yes, of course! I could give them to the gentleman. But we'll do better than that, Lizarann. I'll give them back to you, and you'll give them to the gentleman." An arrangement that pleases Lizarann, whose allegation that there was siskteen, makes the refund a long job. It lasts till the doctor knocks at the room door.

"Who were you talking to, Doctor?" Lizarann's tickle is still on the speaker's face, as she smooths matters—hair and such-like.

"It's the aunt, Widow Steptoe. . . ."

"Do take care, Doctor!"

"Oh—I forgot! It's all right, I think, though . . . she wants a testimonial, to say she can cook. She can't, of course! How's the patient?"

"Look and see! I suppose I must see Mrs. Steptoe. She wants to talk, you know. I could just as easily write to this Mrs. What's-her-name . . . oh yes; I know who it's for . . . as have a long talkee-talkee. If she keeps me, come in as you go, to tell me."

There is a twofold advantage in the loss of a husband who is a curse to your existence—who is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, with all the disadvantages of a community of goods, such as was endured by Zohak the tyrant, who shared his with two serpents that had grown out of him, and partook of him at intervals. One gain is, that your husband is now no more—as the vernacular puts it when not claiming various forms of hereafters for the departed; the other, that we may now mourn his loss and ascribe beauties of character to him without fear of his coming to life to give them practical disclaimers. We can do it with crape, and if we can't afford a pair of black kids, Lisle thread lasts a long time, if wore careful; indeed, Mrs. Hacker, whose testimony we are quoting, was able to dwell on the cheapness of job-lots in the article of mourning, and the advantages we enjoy from sales—advantages unknown to Zohak in his day; only perhaps his snakes outlived him. If they did, there can have been no false note in the pathos with which they spoke of him as "now no more."

Mrs. Steptoe, having been so liberally assisted towards funeral expenses, had been able to enjoy herself thoroughly over the millinery department. Even Bridgetticks had been impressed by the respectability of her appearance. Tallack Street felt it, and joined in tributes to the moral qualities of Mr. Steptoe. It did not shut its eyes to his failing, but rather utilized it to the advantage of his memory, sketching an exalted character that he would certainly have possessed if it had not been undermined by his unfortunate propensity. Each male inhabitant of Tallack Street could conscientiously call upon all his neighbours to bear witness to the many times he had dwelt on what a good, honest, generous, trustworthy nature underlay this unfortunate proclivity to drinking spirits continually, during waking hours, whenever he had a trup'ny bit left, or could get credit, or stood treat to. All agreed to regard it as a sort of involuntary habit, like blinking; or at worst a flaw in culture—like eating peas, or the butter, with the blade of your knife. "The man he was, be'ind it all!"—that was what Tallack Street looked at. The Philosopher might, if Time permitted, have

exclaimed: "*De non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est ratio!*" Tallack Street would have replied, forcibly as we think, that it warn't messin' about with any blooming reasonings—only turning of it over like.

But we doubt if Tallack Street would have recognized Uncle Bob's virtues so readily if his widow's grief had been less effectively shown.

Her mourning gownd was that respectable to look at you couldn't 'ardly tell her for Mrs. Steptoe, goin' along the street, or in at the butcher's. Whereat Tallack Street shook its heads, and accepted the past as a lesson for the future, its older ones saying to its younger ones: "Pore Bob! What did I tell you, N. or M., concernin' of small goes of gin took at all hours and no sort o' system?" The tone of melancholy forgiving retrospect being entirely a reaction produced by the correct attire of the widow.

The same influence made Miss Fossett believe, for the moment, that Mrs. Steptoe *could* cook, for all Dr. Ferris said. She wrote a testimonial for her which suggested that behind the good plain-cooking accomplishment, as scheduled, were unexplored possibilities this candidate for a place would not lay claim to, from modesty. But for the applicant's decent gown and gloves and new umbrella, she would have thought nothing of her account of her cooking powers, as shown many years since in the early days of her marriage, in certain apartments at Ramsgate, where her husband then worked, before they came to London. She had then cooked a dinner for ten persons, with *entrées* and sweets. Miss Fossett hesitated, metaphorically, to swallow this dinner—tried to persuade Mrs. Steptoe to reduce it to eight. That good woman, however, on taxing her memory, rather showed a disposition to increase it to twelve. On which Miss Fossett surrendered at discretion.

"Of course you'll soon get your hand back again, Mrs. Steptoe; and I hope you'll get this place." At this point the character was written, with a full certificate of the circumstances. It seemed worded to convey that a female *cordon bleu*, who had been seeing better days, had been forced by ill-hap to resume her old *rôle* of life. Completing it, Miss Fossett again spoke: "Where did you say you were in service, Mrs. Steptoe? Ramsgate?"

"Not exactly in service, miss."

"What, then?"

"In apartments to let." Mrs. Steptoe seemed a little uncertain; like a respectable person telling fibs, and in a difficulty. Then she saw her way, and went on, relieved. "I was requested to it, as a faviour. Owing to landlady indisposed—having known her from

early childhood." She was proud of this expression evidently. "By the name of Cantrip. I was left in charge, and give every satisfaction. Thirty-two, Sea View Terrace, on the clift."

"And the lodgers had ten people at dinner!" Miss Fossett was surprised, and showed it. The image her mind formed of thirty-two, Sea View Terrace, did not jump with a dinner of ten persons, with *entrées* and sweets. But was it reasonable in not doing so? Mrs. Steptoe must have appreciated the difficulty, for she threw in, "Did you know the house, miss?" and the question was skilful. Miss Fossett admitted that she did not. "But I certainly thought it seemed a large party for a lodging-house," said she, feeling apologetic. She did not wish to be unjust, even to a lodging-house.

Mrs. Steptoe was all amazement that the extensive accommodation of Sea View Terrace should be unknown anywhere in Europe. Her desire to express it seemed to expand beyond dictionaries. Her sakes—why, a many more could have sat down! She then went on to substantiate her statement, giving the names of the guests: "There was Mr. and Mrs. Hallock and family was five, staying in the apartments. And Mrs. Bridgman and her daughter was seven. And Mr. and Mrs. Thorne, and Mr. Hollings—no!—Harris, a young gentleman from town. Countin' up to ten!" Mrs. Steptoe was triumphant. Such detail would verify anything.

"Well!—anyhow, there's the letter, Mrs. Steptoe, and I hope you'll get the place and do well." Miss Fossett was convinced the good woman had been lying, more or less; and so she had, but the only portion of her statement that affects this story was true enough. She had relieved her conscience about the fib that she had cooked this dinner by giving the actual names of those who had eaten it as nearly as she remembered them. Can we not sympathize with her? Are we not human?

She took the letter with abasement and deep gratitude, neither altogether unconnected with a religious fog, unexplained, hanging about the memory of her lamented husband. She inquired after her brother—was looking forward to seeing him on Friday, the next visiting-day at the Hospital—understood he had asked for her to come, with a distinct implication that his nature was a neglectful one, and that she was negletced.

"He has asked for you several times," said Miss Fossett. "But Mr. Taylor thought—so did I—that it would be best for him to know nothing of your husband's death till he was stronger. He puts it down to the Hospital regulations—thinks you have not been

admitted. Mr. Taylor will tell him all about it before you see him."

"As you and the gentleman think best, miss! And the little girl, you was a-sayin', is better?"

"The little girl is a great deal better. Wait a minute, and I'll ask Dr. Ferris if he thinks you could see her."

Mrs. Steptoe, who was quite able to keep her anxiety to see her niece in due subordination, dwelt upon her unwillingness to encroach on Miss Fossett's time. Who, accounting these professions honest—which they weren't—went away and met the doctor coming down. He had been a long time over his patient, she remarked. "This patient," said he, "is good company. Glad to say she's going on capitally. Temperature all but normal."

"That aunt-woman's here still." Miss Fossett drops her voice to say this. "Could I take her up to see her safely, do you think?"

"Can you be sure she won't talk about her conf . . . about her husband, I mean?"

"Ye-es! I think so, if she promises. I don't *know*."

"It can't do any great harm, in any case. The child is thinking of nothing but Daddy. Five past nine—oh dear! I'm off . . . oh yes!—you may try it." And off goes the doctor.

As to Lizarann's interview with her aunt that followed, a few words will be enough. For no story can record everything everywhere closely; it must take and reject. It was, on the part of Aunt Stingy, an unpresumptuous interview, fraught with meek reminders to little girls of what was due on their part towards their benefactors; as also with suggestions of the depravities inherent in all their species. An interview mysteriously saturated with a sense of religious precepts refrained from, but conferring a sense of moral superiority in one who could, had she chosen, have become a well-spring and fountain-head of little-girl-crushing platitudes. On Lizarann's part, an interview with a background of indictments against herself undisclosed connected, no doubt, somehow with her demeanour on the terrible occasion when she saw her aunt and uncle last. She dared not ask what she had done, preferring to refer her blood-guiltiness—of which, as a general rule, she entertained no doubt—in this case to the lucifer-match negotiation which had induced Uncle Bob to leave hold. That seemed more likely than that she had left the street-door stood on the jar. Of course, she might have been convicted of concealed chestnuts; or even, by some necromancy, Aunt Stingy might have divined how near she had felt to passing the forbidden Vatted Rum Corner limit. But the lucifer-match theory seemed the most probable—

not to be broached, however, without the gentleman himself there to protect her. Teacher was good—angelic, indeed—but she was uninformed. And who could say that the evil plausibilities of a subtle human aunt might not persuade her to turn against her *protégée,* and rend her? However, the question was not raised, and Lizarann felt grateful when the said aunt departed, after a horny farewell peck.

But as soon as she had departed, Lizarann became suddenly talkative. "Is Aunt Stingy's new gownd pide for?" said she.

"Inquisitive little monkey!" said Teacher. "Perhaps it is; perhaps it isn't."

"What did it costited?" asked Lizarann. But she was really uninterested about the purchase. She was keeping the question before the House in the hope that the debate would throw a light on a collateral point. "Mrs. Hacker's married daughter Sarah was a widow," said she, to give the conversation a lift. "She wore her cloze out, *she* did."

But why had widowhood come suddenly on the tapis? Evidently sharp ears had heard the doctor's indiscreet speech. Miss Fossett grasped the position. Lizarann would have to know some time. Why not now?

"Poor Aunt Stingy!" She spoke with her eye on Lizarann, on the watch for a guess on the child's part that would assist disclosure. She saw in the large puzzled orbs that met hers, and the small hands pulling nervously at the sheet, that the idea she wanted was either dawning or fructifying. She continued: "Aunt Stingy will have to be a widow now, Lizarann."

The idea had taken hold, and another young mind that up to that moment had looked on Death as a visitor to other families, not hers, had got to face the black terror—just as terrible a mystery, just as cold a cloud, when that which dies is what none would wish should live, as when all worth living for seems lost with it. Even the opportune removal of an Uncle Bob turns the whole world into an antechamber of the great Unknown, and veils the sun in heaven. Nobody had died, in Lizarann's immediate circle, so far, and as for outsiders that was their look out! Uncle Bob wasn't wanted certainly, rather the reverse; but none the less the two large eyes that were fixed on Miss Fossett's informing face filled slowly with tears, and their small owner's hands came out towards her, feeling for something to cry on. Yes!—Uncle Bob was dead, and would never mend any more boots; thus, substantially, the testimony of Teacher, confirming and amplifying the deluge that followed. It was some time before mere awe of Death allowed Lizar-

ann to refer to the fact that Daddy would never enjoy Uncle Bob's society again; there may have been ambiguity here—was it all unmixed disadvantage?—and still longer, quite late in the day, in fact, before her reflections reminded her that Mrs. Hacker's married daughter Sarah, having wore her cloze out, took up with Mr. Brophy, her present husband. A reminiscence evidently recording the exact language of older persons than herself.

"What did you say was the name of that gentleman you met at Royd, Yorick?—the amusing one? . . ."

"Brownrigg?"

"No—the other."

"Challis."

"The same name as the author?"

"He *is* the author. Titus Scroop is his *nom-de-plume*. Why do you ask?"

"Because it must be his wife I wrote Mrs. Steptoe's character for last week. Mrs. Alfred Challis, The Hermitage, Wimbledon."

"Oh yes—that would be. How did you know of her?"

"That Mrs. Eldridge—she's a sort of cousin, you know—wrote to see if I knew of a cook."

"But you knew nothing about Mrs. Steptoe's cooking."

"No—but she can try."

"I don't call that conscientious."

"Oh, my dear Yorick? Isn't that just like you now? If everyone was such a dragon, no one would ever do a good-natured action."

"*Was* it good-natured—to Mrs. Challis?"

"It may turn out so. Mrs. Steptoe may be a real treasure."

The above is short and explains itself. The time of it may have been three days after the previous story time.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW AUNT STINGY BECAME MARIANNE'S COOK. A MOST OFFENSIVE BIBLE CLASS. MR. CHALLIS'S JUDITH. ESTRILD AND THE OSTROGOTHS. THE ACROPOLIS CLUB

It was certainly our friend Marianne at the Hermitage, Wimbledon, to whom Mrs. Steptoe, now a free-lance, was going to apply for a cook's place. It was rather an audacious piece of effrontery; so also are two-thirds of the applications the Registry sends you on, and charges you five shillings for. Mrs. Steptoe was a very poor cook indeed; but, then, it was so long since she done any cooking reg'lar that it was easy for her to forget how poor it had been.

The coincidence was not a miraculous one, and it will not appear so if you will image to yourself Mrs. Charlotte Eldridge coming down very late one morning and opening letters. Further, imagine that the contents of one takes her aback, binds her attention, and excites a sort of torpid curiosity in Mr. John Eldridge, who is just off to catch his train; but the nine thirty-eight will do if he misses it. Then that the lady throws the letter down, and says: "Well, I declare! Elizabeth Barclay, of all people in the world!"

Don't try to imagine Mr. Eldridge, nor his hat, nor its band, nor the woollen comforter he buttons his coat over. It isn't worth the effort. But take the story's word for it that he said "Elizabeth Barclay?" six times, and ended with, "What's she been had up for?"

"John, you're a fool! She's Marianne's cook, and she wants me to find her another. Of course!"

"But what's her game? What's Marianne's cook's little game? What's she been a-takin' shares in? Where's she been selling her dripping to? Tell away, Lotty!—spit it out!" But he does not forward matters, for he again says "Elizabeth Barclay" several times, and finishes up with "Well!"

"When you've done." A pause. "She's going to marry a corn-factor."

Mr. Eldridge closes one eye. "Females do," he says; and then adds, quite inexplicably: "I shouldn't wonder if he was in the Brixton Road."

"It doesn't matter whether he is or isn't. The question is, where am I to go to find a really good plain cook for Marianne?"

"Ah!—that's the question."

"Well, but you might help, instead of looking like a gaby."

"Why not ask that party?"

"What party?"

"Over Clapham way. Some connection. Where you got Ellen Sayce." Mrs. Eldridge looks her despair, for was not Ellen Sayce a girl who wept on the stairs instead of doing them down, and had to return to her parents? Nevertheless the attempt was worth a postcard, which was written as Mr. Eldridge—whose peritonitis had gone—trotted away down a snow-swept footway slapping his gloves, and saying "Elizabeth Barclay" at intervals. But she omitted the date, as she decided not to post it then and there, but to exhaust her other resources first. Ellen Sayce was a poor result.

The consequence of this was that for a month or thereabouts Mr. Eldridge was never without a topic of conversation, frequently calling attention to the unborn postcard in a recess on his wife's *escritoire*. "I say, Lotty, when's Miss Fossijaw's letter a-going?" being his form of query, connecting the matter in hand with phosphorus-poisoning, humorously but not intelligently.

However, when Mrs. Eldridge's other presentments ran dry, the postcard was despatched, and reached Adeline Fossett just the moment after Mrs. Steptoe had been submitting her cookworthiness, and lodging her claims for favourable consideration. Whereupon Miss Fossett despatched a summons to her to come next day for a written character (which would do in this case), and the events we know of followed. There was nothing remarkable in the coincidence whatever.

But there was something very remarkable—so Mrs. Challis had thought—about Elizabeth Barclay's unaccountable desire to marry a corn-factor, after being in the family fourteen years! For the Challis family had monopolized Mrs. Barclay during the whole of that time, and it was natural it should be indignant at her desertion. In fact, Marianne had hardly been able to believe her ears when one day the good woman, who had been very *distraite* over the ordering of dinner, took advantage of its conclusion to say, through huskiness and hesitation, that she had been thinking it well over, and had decided on it, in spite of her attachment to the family and heartfelt desire to cause it no inconvenience. Being pressed to say what she had decided on—which she had not so far mentioned—she had turned the colour of a tomato, and with a determined rush had said: "I have decided, ma'am, to change my

condition," and had then revealed the corn-factor with such a tremendous accent on his first syllable that an impression followed it in the mind of Bob Challis, the boy, home for the holidays, that factors of many other goods had been under consideration, and that Mr. Soul had been the fortunate candidate. For his name was actually Seth Soul.

This, of course, was at the Christmas following Challis *père's* visit to Royd. But Mrs. Barclay had kept her condition unchanged for the time being, to oblige Miss Marianne, which was how she as often as not spoke of Mrs. Challis. That lady had really exerted herself to find a substitute, any plausible application having been referred for settlement to the corn-factor's *fiancée*. That very honest woman had denounced and rejected every candidate for the place so far. She applied the same formula to all: "It don't speak much for her"—that there was such a flaw in her register, or such a defect in her demeanour. It didn't speak much for one that she had just taken a twelvemonth's leisure at a relative's; or for another that she smelt of spirits at that time in the morning; or for another that she nearly came tumblin' down the kitchen flight, and couldn't walk straight. It certainly didn't. But it spoke volumes for Mrs. Barclay's integrity that she rejected them all, when, by accepting one, she might have flown straight to the corn-factor and nested under his wing, the minute her things were got.

The acceptance of our friend Aunt Stingy was the result of desperation, as we have hinted, on Mrs. Challis's part. However, to do her justice, she tried to shift the responsibility off her own shoulders.

"I should not have dared to send her packing after what you said this morning, Titus," said she; scarcely, perhaps, quite fairly. But Titus replied good-humouredly—for think how well that chapter had started!—"Never mind, Polly Anne! I'll be responsible. She'll turn out all right enough, I dare say."

And thus it had come about that Mrs. Steptoe found herself, within six weeks of her husband's death, in a situation where, although its standard of cooking was no better than that of most English houses of the same type, she was hard put to it to keep up the pretence of any knowledge at all. A very slight early experience had to go a long way, and detection and conviction would have ensued if Marianne Challis had profited by her dozen of years of housekeeping. But Elizabeth Barclay had been a treasure; and treasures—that is to say, persons who don't drink, can roast and boil, and know three sorts of soup—make it quite unnecessary for any English mistress to give any thought to the subject. The new

cook, too, was entrenched in a strong position. Who shall say that any chance person who does not know how to pull and grill now was incompetent to pull and grill ten or fifteen years ago? Or that it is impossible that she passed a culinary youth in contact with mayonnaise sauce, truffles, or Gorgonzola cheese, and yet should in that period have forgotten the very names of them? The problem Aunt Stingy had to solve was how to acquire knowledge without admitting ignorance. And the attitude she took up in the pursuit of this object was that of a higher cult graciously stooping to accommodate itself to insular prejudice or mere bucolic barbarism. She elicited a great deal of information by dwelling on skilful achievements hard to believe in, but practised for all that in the Augustan age of her experience, for the tables of an almost Parisian circle of connoisseurs. There was danger in the method, but her intrepidity was more than Murat-like. As, for instance, when, apropos of omelettes, she said that "we"—that is, the cooks attached to that circle—always made them without eggs. On learning that omelettes contained nothing but eggs, she exclaimed with the greatest presence of mind, "Oh yes!—what we used to call egg-pancakes."

"I'm afraid you'll have to give this woman the sack, Polly Anne. She can't cook worth a cent." Thus Mr. Challis, sampling something one day at lunch, perhaps an omelette without eggs.

"Oh, *do* have a little patience, Titus!"

"Well—of course we must give her a fair trial. I didn't mean immediately."

"Anyone would have thought you did. And it only upsets me, and does no good at all. Do leave it alone till Elizabeth Barclay has shown her one or two of her receipts. She's very willing to learn, and goes to chapel." For Marianne was disposed to be lazy about this as about other things, and was inclined to temporize. If Mrs. Steptoe could be educated, why not retain Mrs. Steptoe? "Even if you dined out every night for a time—you know you *can*; look at all those invitations!—it would be better than having to go through it all again. Oh dear!"

But Challis was not anxious either to dine out every night, or to quarrel over the dinners at home. He was really well pleased with himself and his surroundings, when he could feel that he had passed a comfortable domestic evening free from self-questionings and collisions with—well!—that disorder he made the awkward compound word for. But he never got off without scars. When he thought he had succeeded, after a very well-executed quiet evening with his wife, in saying to himself:

"Jam me juvaverit
Viros relinquere
Doctaeque conjugis
Sinu quiescere,"

really almost with earnestness!—all the wind was taken out of his sails by a perfectly uncalled-for reflection on Marianne's education. He was angry after with himself for making it. Besides, no one in his senses could ascribe any abnormal culture to . . . Never you mind!—what on earth had *she* to do with it?

The fact is that, at this date of the story, some two or three weeks after we last heard his voice in that cab that drew up in Grosvenor Square, Challis was keeping watch and ward over his love of his own home and the mother of his two children. His other world—especially the brilliant and fascinating one that centred in the Megatherium Theatre and the preparation of his new play—was both courted and kept at bay by him. He could make no strong stand against its temptations; but he could resent them, and did so. And whenever his conscience—however he nicknamed it—had been especially intrusive, he could always rebuke it by a little more home life than usual, by a more patient toleration of some home discomfort. He did not see that the very fact of his doing penance, as it were, for his enjoyment of that outer world of enchantment, was really opening a postern-gate to admit the enemy his culverins were pounding from the battlements. When he paid himself out for that delightful supper with the Megatheriums in the small hours of the morning by showing forbearance over Mrs. Steptoe's fatuous attempts at cookery, he was no more conscious that he was really pleading guilty on the main issue than was Judith Arkroyd, when she declined an invitation to join it, conscious that she was only hedging against her dallyings with perfect truth and honour towards her family in keeping back the lengths she had gone in rehearsals of the part of Aminta Torrington. Mrs. Steptoe's greasy cookery and a dull pompous dinner at the Duke's each did duty as a salve to conscience without the unwilling sharers in either detecting their own self-deception. But it was good for Mr. Ramsey Tomes, who took Miss Arkroyd in to the banquet and bored her by his appreciation more than by his talk; which Judith mimicked extremely well, to Mr. Challis's great delight, when she met him next day at the theatre. And it was good for Mrs. Steptoe, who between Challis's penances and Marianne's indisposition for another excursion into disengaged-cook land, seemed likely to attain the low standard of excellence we have mentioned as satisfactory to the British housekeeper.

Marianne gave her husband no help. Of course, she was not bound to. *We* know! No woman is under any legal obligation to assist her husband against himself, if his affections—promised at the altar, don't you see?—become weak-kneed and uncertain. He may have to love uphill, but he must take his chance of that. Still, she need not skid his wheels or put stones in his path. But did Marianne do so?

In our opinion she did. Mere words, told in a story, go for little; a shade of accent makes them much or nothing. How, we ask you, did Bob Challis, Rugby-sharpened, know that his mater, whenever she made an allusion to churches or chapels, was having a fling at his Governor? How did Bob know that his Governor was making no answer in italics, as one might say, when he turned to him and said: "Got your new skates, human schoolboy? Let's have a look! Now, why is it no new strap ever has a hole in the right place?" And made conversation, transparently. Bob did know, somehow; and had he been present to hear his mother say that Mrs. Steptoe went to Chapel, he would have quite understood her inflection of voice to convey an addendum, "which *you* don't; or, at least, Church, and you wouldn't say the responses if you did."

If Mrs. Challis would only have left that point alone, it would have made a world of difference in her relation with her husband. Why would she not? He had left her free to secure salvation, not only to her own children, but to her nephew or stepson, whichever you like to call Bob. And he had made no conditions except that he himself should be allowed the luxury of perdition on his own terms. "You let me go to the Devil my own way, Polly Anne," he had said, "and you shall have poor Kate's boy, and tell him any gammon you like." Perhaps the reason why he said—just now in the story—"*Docta conjux,* indeed!" may have been some memory of how, when Bob blacked another boy's eye for calling the Founder of Christianity a Jew, Marianne had defended his action, and condemned the other boy for impiety and heathenism. "And you know I'm right, Titus," said the lady triumphantly.

Of course, it is impossible to say that a really honest fulfilment of the religious bargain would have diverted the current of events into another channel. All the story points to is that if Challis could have reposed on the bosom of his "docta conjux" with less fear of its bristling suddenly—like the image of the Virgin with which the Inquisition convinced the most sceptical—with suggestions of precept or reproof, even as the blessed image shot out spikes, then there would have been one needless apple of discord the less. And if Marianne had carried out her half of the compact,

Titus would certainly have been more scrupulous in saying, before the boy, things of a racy nature on subjects of reverence in the eyes of all Christendom and many thoughtful persons outside it. It wasn't fair to Marianne, who had no sense of humour at all, to develope an old line of critical analysis of the Scriptures for the benefit of Bob; to consider that young man, in fact, as a Bible Class, anxious to discover and record the first mentions of all the trades, all the professions, all the popular complaints delicacy allows to be canvassed in public, all the sports and all the winners, in a volume his mother regarded as sacred. What did it matter how indistinct an idea she had of what she meant by the word *sacred,* or anything else? She might at least have been spared one especial atrocity—the first mention of pugilism. To do him justice, however, Challis was not himself guilty of this triumph of successful research, which we need not record here. It came home from school with Bob next Easter holidays, and Bob teemed and twinkled with it until at last he got the chance of delivering it into his father's ear as he sat astride of his knee, with all the license of a boy just released from the classics.

"You young scaramouch! Where do you expect to go to? Don't you go and tell your mother that!" For Challis, in the presence of this youth, kept up a certain parade of potential reverence, available in extreme cases. He could countenance the first mention of Cannibalism—"The woman tempted me, and I did eat." But this one ran near the confines of the unpermissible—overpast them.

"Shuttleworth and Graves Minor's going to tell their sisters. Because they'll be in such an awful rage!"

"A very low motive. Perhaps you'll be good enough to regulate your conduct on better models than Shuttleworth and Graves Minor."

"Their father's a Bishop. At least, Graves Minor's is. He only allows him a shilling a month pocket-money. He's gone to his aunts Jane and Mary's for the holidays because they're infectious. . . ."

"Which—the holidays or the aunts? Pay attention to your antecedents, young man!"

"Neither. They're infectious at home; they've got scarlet fever. He's awfully glad, because his Aunt Jane lives in a haunted house, and he can get out on the leads. I say, pater!"

"What, offspring?"

"When's that lady coming that gave me my skates at Christmas, and the 'Lives of the Buccaneers'?"

"I don't know. I can't say. Some day." Challis has become reserved suddenly. "Give me the little Japanese ash-pan, and find yourself a chair. A strong one, I should recommend." For Bob is at that pleasant growing age that has relapses into babyhood, if not checked by a hint now and then. He accepts the hint this time, but declines the chair, preferring to lean over the back of his father's, and pull his hair.

"The mater hates her. I don't." Now, if this had been said immediately, it would have seemed much slighter conversation, easy to pass by. Coming after a good pause of hairpulling, it implied a confidence in the speaker's mind that his hearer's had been dwelling, during that pause, on the person he didn't hate and his mother did.

"It's no concern of any young monkey's who his mother hates or doesn't hate."

"Well!—it's true. And I say it's a beastly shame. After all, it wasn't *her* fault that it thawed."

"You unblushing young egotist! Is the whole world to be nothing but skates—skates—skates? *Whose* fault wasn't it? Your mother's?"

"No fear! The mater wanted me to chuck it up, and not skate at all. Rather!" This youth's language depends for expression on a tone of overstrained contempt for experience outside his own. But the desert of his egotism has oases. He reaches one now, and says in quite a natural voice: "I say, pap!"

"Go on, human creature!"

"Shall I tell you what me and Cat . . ."

"What *who?*" This is accompanied by a pantomimic threat of extermination.

"Well! Cat and I, then. , . . what we call her, when we're alone?"

"By all means. Only look alive! Because your father's cigar is waning, and copy is behindhand. Go it!"

"*We* call her Judy. Cat and I do. Short for Judith."

"You'll make your little sister as bad as yourself, and she's too sharp by half already. How do you know her name's Judith? It might be Sarah—or Euterpe."

"But it ain't. It's Judith."

"Ah!—but how do you know? That's the point."

"Because we listened. And we knew the mater meant *her*."

Perhaps if Master Bob had seen his father's face, it would have checked his outflow of virgin candour. But he was behind him, and saw nothing. Challis was balancing a nice question in his mind. Ought he not to check this revelation? Was it not like

eavesdropping to listen to it? He decided that he might, as Marianne would surely never say before the children anything she would not wish him to hear. But he wanted to know, too. Still, he was conscious enough of his wish to know, to find it necessary to impute his reluctance to be influenced by it to that mental vice he had invented a name for.

"How did you know your mother meant her? How did you know she didn't mean the new cook?"

"No fear! *Her* name's Priscilla. Besides, the mater calls her Steptoe. Besides, Aunt Lotty did it, too."

"Did what? What did Aunt Lotty do?"

"Called her Judith. Cat heard her, same as me."

"Probably you ought to say 'same as I,' young man. But it may be an open question." Challis paused, half-minded to request his promising son and heir to keep his confidences in reserve. But the evil genius of himself or Marianne stepped in, and caused Catharine, the little girl, who was still under seven, to sing with her mouth shut as she hung over the bannisters in the passage outside. Master Bob immediately left off pulling his father's hair and rushed to the door, shouting loud enough for the Universe to hear, "Didn't she, Cat?" and ended a perfectly orthodox interview for the collection of evidence by lugging the witness in, nearly upside down, to testify.

"Put your sister down, you young ruffian—do you hear?" And Challis adds under his breath: "Much good your school's doing you!" But the young persons explain simultaneously, "That's how we do," not without pride in an ancient usage.

Now, this little provincialism, or scrap of folklore, had its share in moulding events. For consider!—if a Sabine woman, after Rubens, had been put down right-end-up, anxious to make a statement, who could have refused to listen to her? Challis, who would not have objected to hearing no more of what Aunt Lotty said, felt bound to take the readjusted maiden on his knee—she wasn't Sabine, and he could—and get at the upshot of her disjointed testimony. Master Bob, following ascertained usage, dictated or suggested her evidence; and nipped anticipated statement in the bud, at his convenience. Between the two of them, however, it was clear enough what sort of talk had gone on between their mother and Aunt Lotty.

"After all," said the vexed man to himself, after packing off his young informants to presumable mischief elsewhere—"after all, what can it matter if Marianne *did* say in a moment of irritation that I might go away to . . ." he paused on the next two words,

and finished without them abruptly ". . . altogether if I liked!" Then he tormented himself a little about his own shrinking from uttering the words "my Judith," and ended by saying them in a cowardly way, under his breath, to show his independence.

He was sitting in his library at the time, opposite to a half-written sheet of foolscap. It was copy,. waiting for more copy, which came not. Challis denied his self-accusation that this was owing to the way that fool of a woman's words had upset him—meaning Charlotte Eldridge; he absolved his wife. Had he not often to wait for an idea, to get a start with? Let him see, where was he? Oh yes!—where Estrild tears off her jewels and flings them at the Ostrogoths. Judith Arkroyd would be simply magnificent there! For this was the great tragedy he had promised Judith he would try his hand on expressly for her. How that incomparable arm and hand would tell, with Estrild's blood visible on it, torn by the bracelet her vehemence had plucked off! . . .

Very likely it was all a blunder of the kid's, and Charlotte Eldridge had never said any such thing. Was it likely she would say, "Of course, Titus calls her Judith, when they're alone"? Still, the deposition did sound like that, and that was a damnable mischief-making woman, mind you! Challis was conscious, as he said this to himself, of an image of Charlotte Eldridge, rather a graceful one, turning an impish glance over her shoulder to see the effect of some apple of discord, just thrown. There was a skittishness about this image, a skirt-sweep, that was true to life. So was the becoming hat the odious woman always wore indoors whenever she could, with that meaning feather in it. How Challis hated her as he thought to himself that they all meant, somehow, her studentship in the University in which that dowdy Eros, whom we mentioned before, was Dean of the Faculty of Discord-breeding between a lady and gentleman, about a gentleman or lady. But they were the constituents of a Stylish Female, according to John Eldridge, her husband, the victim of peritonitis.

"Come *in!*" No wonder Mr. Challis said it a little impatiently, when a knock came at his study-door, because he had just got his idea, and was at last effectively at work again upon the Ostrogoths. The impatience caused Marianne, who had knocked, to say that another time would do as well. But to her husband's sensitive hearing the tone, distant and severe, in which she said it spoke volumes. And the Tables of Contents of those volumes related to gulfs placed between married couples resident in Wimbledon by fashionable beauties with a turn for the stage. It was a large order for a mere tone of voice, but it was quite filled out, as the

commercial phrase it. Challis could not possibly allow Marianne to depart, closing the door with aggressive gentleness. It would have been checking the items of the large order. "Come back!" he shouted. "What *is* it? How *can* you be absurd, Polly Anne? Come in!"

Polly Anne came in, but every step of her entry was fraught with instant withdrawal. "I won't keep you a minute, because of Steptoe and the dinner," she said, jumbling her context horribly. "Only I must know if you're going out or not."

Challis really tried to be jolly and good-natured over it. "Oh no! it's all right," said he. "I'm at home to-night."

"You had better make sure." She spoke rather like an iceberg—a forbearing one, but still an iceberg. "Look at your cards on the chimney-piece."

Now, the fact was that the lady knew the position, having gone over the ground the evening before in her husband's absence. "The pink card!" said she. And thus guided, Challis found himself brought to book—convicted of inconsiderate forgetfulness alike of his friend and his household. "I wish you would be more careful," said the iceberg.

"But I really did think the Acropolis was to-morrow, the twenty-third."

"To-day is the twenty-third." One more degree of frost on the iceberg.

"I thought to-day was Wednesday." A feeble effort to extenuate.

"To-day is Thursday. You see on the card. It doesn't matter. I can easily arrange with Steptoe. . . . Oh no!—you can't throw them over at the last moment. Quite absurd!"

"Well!—I'm awfully sorry."

"It makes no difference at all. Now, I won't disturb you any more." And the iceberg retired.

But if Challis had given way to his first impulse, had run after his wife, kissed her, said good-humouredly, "Don't be miffy, Polly Anne!—I shall be at home to-morrow. And you know the Acropolites *did* ask you too"—had he done this, all might have gone better. But his impulse was weakened by the thought—or the knowledge—that his wife knew perfectly well when she entered the room that he had this engagement, and must already have made all her household arrangements with reference to it. He resented her insincerity, and though he rose from his chair and went towards the door, his resentment had the best of it half-way, and he bit his lip and returned, looking vexed. Now, why couldn't she have said

honestly to him at breakfast, "Recollect, to-night's the Acropolis dinner"? He was in such a state of sensitive irritation that, just as he was getting into stroke again, he had a new upset—caught a crab, as it were—because Estrild reminded him of Eldridge, and brought the whole vexation back in full force!

CHAPTER XX

MRS. ELDRIDGE IN FULL BLOW. THE IMPROPER STUDY OF MANKIND. NOTHING REALLY WRONG! AN IDENTIFICATION WITH A VENGEANCE. HOW CHALLIS CAME HOME LATE

BE good enough to note that none of the characters in this story are picturesque or heroic—only chance samples of folk such as you may see pass your window now, this moment, if you will only lay your book down and look out. They are passing—passing all day long—each with a story. And some little thing you see, a meeting, a parting, a quickened step, a hesitation and return, may make the next hour the turning-point of an existence. For it is of such little things the great ones are made; and this is a tale made up of trifles—trifles touching human souls that, for aught we know to the contrary, may last for ever.

It is the share Marianne had in a thousand little things like the triviality with which our last chapter ended that makes us say that she gave her husband no help against himself. Many a time a word of concession from her, in answer to any of his unspoken appeals for help—for the plain truth is, he made many such appeals—might have led to a rushed embrace of reconciliation, and a flood of not altogether uncontrite tears from her, and even some from him; for though one may pity him, he cannot be held absolutely blameless. The fact is, Alfred Challis had loved this Marianne even better than ever he did her sister, Bob's mother—loved her, that is, as men love what is called *beauté de diable,* and a kind of rough, good-natured manner. Besides, see how good she was with the boy!

If there had been no core of jealous reserve born of overstrained self-respect inside this rosy-seeming apple—if the girl would have obligingly matured without change—she would always have remained Polly Anne, as of old. But the core was there, and there Challis was to find it, after a pleasant year or so of experience of the outside of the fruit—the best part. Hence she came to be Marianne rather than Polly Anne to him, oftener and oftener; Mrs.

Challis rather than Marianne to friends; and "your mother" rather than "mamma" to the children.

She was not the woman for the position in which she found herself. There was really only one chance of steady sailing for the domestic ship, and that was that she should go everywhere with her husband, brave the snubs of the scornful toff, laugh at her own inferiorities, and, above all, rejoice publicly at every new success of her husband. Inwardly she may have done the last; all the other conditions she failed in. The one chance was not caught at, and this man found himself alternately in the brilliant world of Imperial London, made much of, looked up to as an authority and quoted, refusing from sheer plenitude welcomes to one rich house after another—all these on the one hand, and on the other—suppose we put it briefly—Mrs. Steptoe.

If Marianne had only had a friend who would have pointed out the exaggerated nature of her impressions about the motley crew we owe so much to Sir Bernard Burke for telling the likes of us about! A friend, even, who would have said to her, "Don't give way to jealous pride, stupid; but go and observe the ways of the human toff, and come home and tell me, *ici bas*. I'll do your hair for you." But there was none such!—only Charlotte Eldridge!

Mrs. Eldridge certainly got some satisfaction out of the concern; it would have been a sad pity if no one had got any. It was all in the way of her own specialty, the proper—or improper—study of her kind. It may as well be admitted that the conversation the children overheard part of had run thus:

"I don't think, dear, that my feeling uneasy whenever John is out of my sight ought to count. John is a fool. Besides, girls that apply for situations are very mixed, whether telegraph or sorters. The most dangerous class of girl may apply. The safeguard in his case is that there is so little reserve in his nature. When his admiration is excited he always makes grimaces about them, and then I know who, at once. If taxed with them he always whistles popular airs and shuts one eye. 'Pop goes the Weasel' or 'Tarara-boomdeay.' But I try to believe he knows where to draw the line. This case is different."

"I don't see the difference."

"The girls are different. This Miss Sibyl What's-her-name . . ."

"The one Titus admires so much is Judith. Sibyl's the Art Coiffeur one, that wanted to do my hair like a picture of Titian's. . . ."

"Titian's mistress, I suppose. They did, then. Well!—I meant

Judith. Don't you see how entirely different the cases are? Judith's position!—the publicity, dear!—the whole thing! . . ."

"No!—I see no difference."

"My dear!—what nonsense! Do you mean to say . . . why, only look how he 'Miss Arkroyds' and 'Miss Sibyls' them! One judges from little things."

"When we're here, Titus does. But when they're alone . . .?"

"Well, of course! When they're alone, Mr. Challis *may* call her Judith. I don't say he *does,* but suppose he does, what does it all amount to? . . . Now *don't* be unreasonable, Marianne dear!"

"I am *not* unreasonable, Charlotte. . . . Nonsense! I'm *not* crying about it. I wouldn't be such a fool. But all I can say is, if Titus wants to go away to his Judith, let him go? *I* don't want to keep him, against his will. . . . What are those children at, in there?" At which point the conversation may stop.

Incidentally, it helps us to see that Sibyl had lent herself to an effort, which seemed to her—as to us—a politic one, to induce Mrs. Alfred Challis to be a little more coming and tractable. She quite appreciated that friendship between her sister and Challis, if Marianne was included in it, would be a very different thing from the same thing, conditioned otherwise. And when she called at the Hermitage with her sister, she was strongly impressed that scandal, if any arose, would be the more dangerous unless Marianne could be induced to change her attitude, which suggested that of a civil tigress, with a grievance against the jungle.

"You needn't make a fuss about me," said Mrs. Challis to her husband, just departing for the Acropolis Club. He always went through an apologetic phase, partly real, every time he deserted the domestic hearth. This time his remorse was superficial; for surely Marianne might just as well have accompanied him to this entertainment. You know the Acropolis Club, no doubt?—a cock-and-hen club of the purest water, with about the proportion of hens one sees in farmyards. He would have preferred her coming. However, he wasn't to make a fuss about her; that was settled. It was fine, she said; and Charlotte had said she would come in if it was fine. Challis became aware that Charlotte must have said she would come in, sometime before he himself had been reminded of his engagement to go out. His remorse vanished all the quicker, and he was beginning to enjoy his clean shirt-front—a phrase his mind put by for his next story on any light social subject—before his hansom landed him at Wimbledon Station. The Acropolis, you

remember, is barely ten minutes cab from Waterloo, so this way did perfectly.

"John finds it do better," said Mrs. Eldridge, arriving in due course. "Only when he wants a walk he goes by East Putney, because the District saves him at the other end. Eight o'clock dinner, I suppose. Besides, they won't be punctual. They never are, nowadays." This was said to show how thoroughly *au fait* the speaker was of the ways of fashionable life. It was mere talk by the way, unspiced by direct reference to any Eros, respectable or otherwise.

"I know nothing about them," said Marianne damningly—that is, so far as a suggestion that she was none the worse thereby could condemn. Another, that it was best to know little of the class referred to, was latent. It rankled though, all the more that Mrs. Eldridge's expressive silence recognized its existence better than words. A garrulous person's silence may have all the force of a pause in a symphony. When the *bâton* of Mrs. Eldridge's conductor, Mischief, allowed the music to steal gently in again, it came on tiptoe, with subtle finished skill; a pianissimo flute-phrase in the stillness, harbinger perhaps of a volume of sound.

"Couldn't you—Marianne dear—couldn't you . . .?"

"Couldn't I what?" It may be unfair to use the adjective grumpy to describe this question. When a lady beds her chin in both hands, with her elbows on her knees, and gazes at a slow-combustion stove doing its best, while she speaks, her words may have an altogether false effect.

"Ah—well! Perhaps I oughtn't to say. . . . Never mind, dear! Let's talk of something else. How's Mrs. Steptoe getting on with her soups?" A brisk rally of the orchestra—a rousing thrill on the drum. But too artificial!

"Elizabeth Barclay's been here to-day, to show her about blotting-paper. Greasy, and then Titus grumbles. But what did you mean to say?"

The conductor hushes the orchestra—gives gentle permission again to the flute. "No, dear, I oughtn't to say. Because I know how you feel about it, exactly. But what I thought of saying was . . ."

"Yes. Do go on, Charlotte!"

"Couldn't you have made up your mind to go—just this once? Because you *were* asked, this time."

"I shouldn't have enjoyed myself."

"Of course not, dear! Neither should I. But you know what I

think. It all turns on a question of prudence. *Anything* is better than an *esclandre.*" The other instruments come in again, and the conductor is warming to his work.

"I don't see why we want anything French in it. There's nothing of that sort, so far as I know."

"Of course not, with the people!" Given, that is, this character cast, Parisian laxities have no chance. But distinctions must be made. "Nobody's the least likely to *do,* but people will *say,* exactly the same as if they did do." Better expressed by Hamlet, in the plague he offered poor Ophelia as a dowry! Who shall escape calumny?

Marianne mutters something her friend takes to be, "I don't care what people say." The orchestra—pursuing our strained musical metaphor—sees a *crescendo* phrase ahead, and the conductor interprets it as *accelerando.*

"That's where you're so wrong, dear—do forgive me for saying it! But you *are* wrong. Pure and honest natures like yours always make that mistake. Of course you know, and I know—we all know—that to speak of anything really wrong in the same breath with your husband would be absurd, and even this fashionable girl for that matter. I mean, you know, really wrong." A nod-supported whisper—the music goes to *pianissimo* quite suddenly; consider the sharp ears of Mrs. Steptoe, and Harmood, in the kitchen! But enough of that. *Our* text calls for no secrecies; brush them aside, and resume without pedals, but *con espressione.* "But everyone is not like you, dear! So many people take pleasure in putting—well! the most horrid constructions on the most *inno*cent. . . . What?" For Mrs. Charlotte had stopped to gloat so long over the first syllable of *innocent*—she did not enjoy the "horrid constructions" half so much—that she had not heard what Marianne said. Who, on request, repeated it:

"I didn't say I didn't care what people said . . . oh well!—I've forgotten what I did say now, and it doesn't matter. Anyhow, I consider I've done *my* duty, and now I simply won't *go* to any of their dinners, come what may, Acropolis Club or no! So there!" This is a stronger ground than a plea of simple non-enjoyment as a cause of abstention, and Charlotte makes no protest. Her mind, too, is attracted by another point. She speaks dreamily to express that it is feeling its way, as through a mist, to illumination.

"What was it . . . oh, don't you know? Lewis Smithson heard it . . . oh dear!—what *was* the name of the club now? One of these mixed clubs . . . oh no!—of course, I know what

the story itself was—you needn't tell me that! . . . I mean what was the name of the club?" But Marianne cannot help, and conversation can't stop for it. At any rate, it wasn't the Acropolis. Which Mrs. Eldridge repeats more than once confirmatorily, to make the Acropolis safe before resuming the general question. She dismisses the legend itself—what it was does not matter here—as quite unworthy of credence. "I believe Lewis Smithson made it himself," she says. "Anyhow, it's nonsense. For my part, I should say they were much more likely to be stiff and straight up, for fear of its getting about. Besides, who was it you said was coming to this party? Lord and Lady Who?"

"Some name like Albatross."

"Ross Tarbet. Why, my dear, they're *the pink!* Corstrechan Castle in Banffshire. Oh no!—it's all right enough as far as that goes. But still I *do* think, if you ask me, it would have been just as well if you hadn't refused."

"Why? I do wish you would speak plainly, Charlotte, and not go round and round."

Mrs. Eldridge won't commit herself to a statement without passing through a period of reflection. It is consistent with the contemplation of the shadow of her free hand, held beyond it, on the screen she is interposing between her face and the fire. Its silhouette of outspread fingers seems to satisfy her, and not to interfere with the thoughts that her drooped eyelids and fixed look are grave about. After quite enough cogitation, she says abruptly: "I wasn't thinking of *at* the dinner. Nor the rest of the evening. But seeing home comes in. However, if you think of it, she would be with the Ross Tarbets, and they would drive her home. Let's see! The club's in Jermyn Street. Her family are in Grosvenor Square. I fancy the Ross Tarbets are in Park Lane. It's all in the way."

Such talk ought to have had a soothing, reassuring influence. Miss Arkroyd under the wing of a live Countess, safe of an escort to the paternal mansion, what more could be asked? Nevertheless, there is an hysterical sound—to Mrs. Eldridge's experienced ear—in the laugh with which Marianne says: "What silly nonsense! As if it made any difference to me if Titus saw the girl home in twenty cabs!"

"Because you have such confidence in Titus, my dear. And that is right! I wouldn't trust John myself. But he's different."

If Marianne had been in the least a humorist, the image of Mr. Eldridge, in danger from an aristocratic enchantress, seeking to unsettle his devotion to the stylish female he could now call his

own, would have drawn from her a more genuine laugh than her last. But she was in no mood for laughing, and the greatest booby in Christendom might have passed muster with her as a parallel to her husband. We are not prepared to say he had not done so in the present case.

Marianne got up uneasily from the low chair she sat on before the fire; took another, but did not keep it long; rose again, and walked restlessly about the room. Unlike her!—so thought her companion, glancing up at her keenly, but furtively. Mrs. Eldridge had no definite plan of mischief; she only wanted the luxury of caressing her favourite subject. She felt a little alarmed, and rather wished the disquieted one would sit down again. But Marianne showed no tendency to do so. On the contrary, she said suddenly: "I forgot to tell Martha those underthings must not go to the wash. That woman always shrinks them," and left the room. Mrs. Eldridge heard her bedroom door close above, but no sound of colloquy with Martha. Then her attention was taken off by a tap at the door, whose executant she gave leave to come in.

It was Mrs. Steptoe, meek and creditable as an evening-cook; to wit, one that has done her washing-up. A sense of chapel hangs upon her, and the cough she gives as preface to speech seems conscious of its indebtedness to a pause in some sort of devotional service undefined. Her widowhood and the distinction of her sudden loss have given Aunt Stingy a chastened identity. But though in the ascendant, she will not obtrude herself. Mrs. Challis —servants seem lately to have left off saying *missis* and *master*— not being to the fore, she will retire and remain in abeyance, exceptin' rang for. It was only to remind about ordering Huntley and Palmer, Mr. Challis being that particular. But Mrs. Challis would be back directly, said Mrs. Eldridge. Aunt Stingy, nothing loth, would remain to chat.

Interrogated, Lizarann's aunt is finding the place comfortable. The ketching chemley draws a little imperfect, certainly; but the boiler full up, if hot over-night, lastis on the next day, and any quantity. A great convenience! It is noticeable about Mrs. Steptoe's speech that it does not improve when she tries to talk up to her company. When she spoke to her equals in Tallack Street, without desire to impress, she was provincial and unpolished, but seldom Cockney. Now, her attempts to be classical and win respect from Mrs. Eldridge are failures.

"What sort of a place was Mrs. Fossett's!"

"*Miss!*—excusin' my makin' bold to correct. But not in a place there. Only as a reference."

"Where was your last place, then?" But Mrs. Steptoe explained, with many reserves and sidelights, that she had never been truly in service; having led, broadly speaking, a regal life, until she married beneath her, but, nevertheless, into a respectable trade connection. The suggestion that her husband's brain had been affected rounded off a tale that hinted at ancestry and a pursuing evil destiny—the race of Laius! "But you used to cook, wherever you were, once," said Mrs. Eldridge, wedded to practical issues.

"Oh, there, now!—cook, indeed! Why, I was sayin', only today, to Miss Harmood, 'If you could have seen the table they kep' at Sea View, soups and jellies and made-up dishes and the whole attention left to me, in the manner of speakin'.' Owing, ma'am, you see, to uncertain health, my aunt's sister—in charge of the establishment—suffering with a complication, and terminated fatally eleven years this Easter Day. Coming back to me, naturally, with the season." A retrospective sigh, over life's changes, came well in here.

"Was it a sort of private hotel, or boarding-house?" Mrs. Eldridge thought she saw light.

Mrs. Steptoe conveyed general assent, without close definition. "But very select!" she added. And Mrs. Eldridge said, "Of course," entirely without reason.

Aunt Stingy felt encouraged, and made up her mind to resume in full all particulars of the banquet we have heard about. After all, she is not the only person that ever dwelt overmuch on scanty incidents of slight importance in themselves; but oases, for all that, in the arid stretches of an eventless life. Besides—as her tale showed after Mrs. Eldridge had heard all about the splendid cooking accommodation of this establishment at Ramsgate, and full particulars almost of every dish on the table—there was revealed a curious sequel to this seaside dissipation, which no doubt would have been communicated to Mrs. Challis, if that lady had been as inquisitive as her friend. For Mrs. Charlotte hearing of an occasion—fifteen years ago!—when six or eight persons of either sex had dined together, forthwith smelt rats, and made for their places of concealment with the alacrity of a Dandie Dinmont.

"You seem to remember them all very well, Mrs. Steptoe."

"Along of what followed, no doubt, ma'am." The speaker appeared to become suddenly reserved, but awaiting catechism for all that.

Mrs. Eldridge's shrewd intelligence reached the issue promptly. "Perhaps you promised not to tell it. Don't tell me!" This would

have disappointed Aunt Stingy, if she had believed it genuine. But she didn't, and confirmation of her disbelief came. "Only really, it's so long ago! It's almost ridiculous." The catechumen still awaited pressure. "But do just as you feel, Mrs. Steptoe. Of course, it's no affair of mine."

Aunt Stingy laughed slightingly, to remove the matter from among grave responsibilities. "Ho, as for that," she said, "I was never under any promise—only Mr. and Mrs. Hallock wished no reference made. Only, as you was sayin', such a many years after . . . Is that Mrs. Challis coming?" But it wasn't.

"She's speaking to Martha upstairs. She won't come yet." Mrs. Eldridge betrays her curiosity—is very transparent. So urged, Aunt Stingy gives, not at all obscurely, a narrative some ten minutes long, which, for all purposes of this story, may be condensed as follows:—

The Mr. and Mrs. Hallock who figure in it had, for some not very evident reasons, felt justified in abetting the marriage of their nursery-governess with a man supposed to be of good means and antecedents, with the full knowledge that this marriage was concealed from her family, and was to remain so for a term. The dinner that was Aunt Stingy's culinary triumph was a festivity to welcome this happy couple on their return from a short honeymoon. The young gentleman named as Harris among the guests was a friend of the bridegroom. So far, nothing very criminal. But there was a sequel. The Hallocks, returning next season to the same apartments, where it seemed they spent every summer, frequently referred to the affair, but always with surprise that no news had reached them of the wedded couple, and this in spite of inquiries by letter. "Ungrateful girl!" was their verdict. One morning towards the end of their stay they were dumbfounded by an advertisement of a wedding, in the *Telegraph*. The bride actually bore the name of their ex-governess—her maiden name, that is—while the bridegroom's was, to their nearest recollection, that of the friend who had been introduced to them as Mr. Harris the year before. That was the substance of Mrs. Steptoe's story.

"They were that surprised," she said, "you might have knocked either of 'em down with an electric shock. 'My word,' says Mr. Hallock, 'to think of that!' he says. 'Then Horne must be dead, and that girl married to his friend already! And not so much as a letter!' . . . Oh yes! Mr. Hallock, he was resentful like, but Mrs. Hallock, she leans across to him, and she says: 'My dear, it's a coincidence! Kate never would—never! I *knew* the

girl,' she says. So she talked him down, and they put it at a coincidence, and let it go."

"But did you hear no more?"

"*They* heard—not me! Or only remarks fell by chance. There come a letter next day, and they was a-talking and she a-crying over it. Little scraps they let drop, loud enough to reach. 'Ho, the miscreant!' and 'The licensual scoundrel!' And then Mrs. Hallock she says: 'Whatever could possess us, Edwin, not to make more certain about the ceremony?' Then they see me, and dropped to a whisper. Only saying to me after, not to repeat anything I'd heard, which I made the promise, as requested."

"There's Mrs. Challis coming. I wish you could have been more sure of the names, because it's interesting. Couldn't you think them up a little?"

Mrs. Steptoe cogitated. Hallock, of course, she said. Because she knew *them* a long time. But the other names hardly, to be any surer. Except it was the young lady's single name. Because that she see in the newspaper, when she come to look at the advertisement. Then she must have seen the bridegroom's name, said her interrogator. It seemed not; the glance was a hurried one. But she was sure about the girl's. It was Catherine Verrall.

This story has only had occasion once to refer to the name of Challis's first wife, Marianne's half-sister. And though Mrs. Eldridge had often talked with her friend about this half-sister, dead five or six years before the families became acquainted, it was always about "Kate"—no other name—or "my sister" when Marianne was the speaker. It is quite an open question whether she would at once have felt the name familiar, if it had not been for Bob's full name. Her knowledge that it was Robert Verrall Challis was perhaps what made her say, "What?—what's that?—did you say Verrall?" with stimulated interest. Mrs. Steptoe repeated "Catherine Verrall" quite distinctly, just as her mistress, returning, opened the door. Mrs. Eldridge hoped, without having had time to make up her mind why, that Marianne had not heard the name. For a few moments she thought she had not. The whole thing happened very rapidly.

Mrs. Steptoe delivered her reminder about Huntley and Palmer's Oatmeal Biscuits, to be ordered with the stores. Mrs. Challis had not forgotten them. One or two other small matters were referred to, and then Mrs. Steptoe said good-night with due humility, and departed. She was instructed not to sit up for Master Bob, who had gone to a neighbour's to assist in acting charades. Marianne would let him in. She did not resume her seat by the fire, but

lay down on the sofa, away from it. She had a flushed, turbulent look, and a smell of eau-de-Cologne, backed by ruffled hair over the forehead, conveyed the idea that she had been putting it on her face, to cool it. Mrs. Eldridge felt uneasy. Had she gone too far?

"Was it all right about the flannels?" she asked.

"I think so. I don't know. I didn't see Martha. I felt sick, and lay down. . . . Oh yes!—I'm all right now."

"No, you're not, dear! You look very flushed. Shan't I get something? A little brandy-and-water?"

"Oh heavens, no!—make me sick! Like on the steamer—the very idea makes me ill! There's nothing the matter."

Mrs. Eldridge wasn't convinced. Should she open the window to let a little air in? She was one of those plaguing people that *will* remedy, whether you like it or no. Mrs. Challis repulsed her open-window movement with some asperity; reduced her to fiddling with her screen with a fixed gaze of solicitude, fraught with ultimatums about medical advice, failing prompt improvement in the patient.

Marianne remained still on the sofa, with her eyes closed for a few minutes. Then she said suddenly, rather as one who turns to an offered relief: "What were you and Steptoe saying about my sister when I came in?"

Her hearer started; grasped the coincidence of name fully for the first time probably. "Your sister, Marianne. . . . Why, how?" And then, with a complete perplexity: "How could that be?"

"My sister was Catherine Verrall—my sister Kate, that died. Why were you talking about her?"

"It must have been another Catherine Verral—*must* have been."

"*Who* must have been?"

"This girl. Stop, and I'll tell you! . . . But, really, the coincidence!" And, indeed, Mrs. Charlotte seems almost knocked silly by it, as the pugilists say. Marianne is roused and interested at her perplexity—sits up on the sofa fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief—seems half inclined to laugh.

"What's it all *about,* Charlotte?" she says, and then adds—a little passing tribute to the memory abruptly revived—"Poor Kate!"

"Oh, my dear, of course it's nothing to do with poor Kate. Just an odd coincidence of a girl Mrs. Steptoe knew at Ramsgate, I think—years ago!"

"Kate was at Ramsgate, though, when I was a child. She taught music to some people's children. What *was* their name

now?" But the name would not come back, on any terms. Marianne gave it up. Her friend felt actually glad, for the puzzle was too incisive to be pleasant.

"Very likely she was at Ramsgate. Why not? But she hadn't been twice a widow when she married your Titus, at any rate. Come, Marianne!"

"Certainly not! She wasn't nineteen, for one thing. Was this coincidence-lady a widow?"

"Perhaps I had better tell you the story?"

"Much better, I should say." On which Mrs. Eldridge repeats Mrs. Steptoe's tale, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance, but with a tendency—very common in narratives we pass on to others, but ourselves have no part in—to substitute descriptions or epithets for names. Thus the Mr. and Mrs. Hallock of the original narrative appeared as "this lady and gentleman" until Mrs. Challis, whose puzzled look was on the increase, asked a question about them:

"What were they—this lady and gentleman? What was their name?"

"I fancy he was a coal-merchant or dealer in something. Mrs. Steptoe didn't say. The name was Hallock." Mrs. Challis sprang up from the sofa, excitedly.

"Charlotte!—*what* did you say? Hallock?"

"Yes—Hallock. Why not?"

Marianne's breath is quite taken away. "But that is the name I had forgotten—Hallock," she says, as soon as she can speak. "They're in one of those photographs in the old book—the one I brought from mother's." Her speech is rapid and frightened. The strangeness of the story is getting its mastery; and she feels, without imaging them, the ambushes in wait for her. "Oh dear!" she gasps, sinking back again on the sofa, "all this—it's so odd! Charlotte, I'm afraid to look at the photograph."

Charlotte's nerves are stronger, and she has recovered from the momentary alarm her friend had given her; is ready, one might say, to be in mischief again. "Don't be a goose, Marianne," she says. "You're frightened of everything. Do let's get the thing explained, dear, instead of going dotty over it. Which photograph book is it? . . . left-hand chiffonier? . . . no?—right-hand . . . top shelf? . . . No!—I won't make a mess. . . . I expect it's this."

It was, and it exactly confirmed Mrs. Eldridge's anticipation of a coal-merchant and his wife, two young daughters, and a governess a few years older than themselves. A stupid seaside photographer's

group, but with well-marked face-features. The artist's address in a little oval underneath, conspicuously Ramsgate.

"Of course it's all some confusion of Mrs. Steptoe's," says Mrs. Eldridge. She knows she is talking nonsense, but she wants to calm all troubled waters while she gets her curiosity satisfied. "You'll see she won't recognize any of these—unless you give her hints, Marianne."

This is unprovoked, and Marianne resents it. "Show them to her when I'm not there if you like. Show her now and I'll go. Only I'm afraid they're gone to bed." If they have, no harm in ringing the bell! It is rung, and evolves Harmood, apologetic for not having gone up yet. And then Mrs. Steptoe, even more so.

Marianne does not go, but then that was mere talk. Mrs. Eldridge wants Steptoe—so she tells her—to see if she recognizes a photograph. Aunt Stingy is not dissatisfied to be consulted about anything. Mrs. Eldridge shows diplomacy, astutely getting her to identify Mrs. Challis at different ages. Having put the witness on a false scent, she shows the group, and asks: "Now which of those is Mrs. Challis?"

The witness tried to find an excuse for identification, but failed. But having admitted failure, why hold so tightly to the photo-album?

"Well, Mrs. Steptoe?" Mrs. Eldridge speaks.

"Nothing, ma'am. Oh no!—only what unaccountably caught my eye. Nothing to detain. What would be termed an impression." She relinquished the album slowly with a vaguely constructed "Excusin' the liberty I took, I'm sure!"

"You noticed something, Mrs. Steptoe?"

"In the manner of speaking, yes! But not to detain. It just cut across me like . . . yes, ma'am, thank you, just a minute!" For Mrs. Eldridge had said, "Look at it again," and handed the open book back.

Aunt Stingy looked and looked, in more and more visible bewilderment. Pressed to explain it, she at last said: "I can't make no less of it, put it how you may. That's Mr. and Mrs. Hallock I was telling of, just now half-an-hour gone. And *that* is the young lady."

Iterations, stimulated by an incredulity Mrs. Eldridge affects in order to procure them, are interrupted by a knock at the front door. Mrs. Steptoe departs to open it. It is Mr. Eldridge, to accompany his wife home. He is not, she says, to hurry and fuss, but to sit down and wait, and not knock things over. He makes the remark, "Somethin' up! Easy does it!" implying, perhaps,

readiness to wait for enlightenment, and becomes seated, but knocks nothing over. His wife throws him a gleam, to live on. "We are discussing the identity of a photograph," she says.

An occurrence interposes, Master Bob's arrival; the toleration for a few brief moments of exultation over the evening's successes, and his dismissal to bed, rather disgusted at Europe's want of appreciation. Then Mrs. Steptoe, who had retired to admit him, re-enters and resumes.

"Those are the parties I told you, ma'am," says she, in an undertone of confidence brought forward from the previous conversation, rather definitely exclusive of the newcomer, who had overlapped it. But he has his ideas, and as soon as he has thoroughly polished with his wrist the bridge of a nose he has just blown, he offers counsel:

"No name on 'em? Look on the back. Look on the edges where they tuck in. Nothin' like lookin'!" His wife accepts the suggestion without tribute to his sagacity; and when the photo is slipped from the *passepartout*, there on the back is plainly written: "Mr. and Mrs. Hallock, Nelly, Totty, and self. June, 1888."

"She'll be all right," said Mrs. Eldridge, returning to her husband in the drawing-room a quarter of an hour later. For Mrs. Challis, already upset by her previous interview with her friend, had been in no condition to have it burst upon her suddenly that important events—which she could not the least understand, so far—relating to her sister's life, and perhaps to his own, had been concealed from her by this husband whom she was now called upon to have so much faith in. She had completely broken down; had left the room white as ashes, having been previously flushed and feverish; and had nearly fainted away on the stairs. She had been got safely to bed, and had so far recovered as to be able to say that she should go to sleep soon. Perhaps her chief wish was to be let alone. She wanted to think to the bottom of this photograph story. What was it all about?

But Mr. Eldridge perceived that this sort of weather was trying to some constitutions, and suggested drastic treatment. His wife said, "Be quiet while I write this," and ignored his suggestions. She wrote a brief note to Mr. Challis, and left it in his bedroom candlestick on the hall-table outside. He was sure to see it. She then asked her husband whether he was coming, or was going to go on mooning there indefinitely. He chose the former course without insisting on closer definition of the latter.

A couple of hours later Alfred Challis paid a cabman a shilling

too much, to avoid discussion, through his confessional *guichet* overhead, and escaped from a guillotine—thanks to its momentary forbearance—in a steady shower of rain that had heard that the wind had fallen, and caught at the opportunity to come down. It was lucky he had a waterproof on, though he had only to negotiate the garden's length to reach shelter and discover his latchkey.

He was not in the best of humours; all the more so that Miss Arkroyd, who was to have accompanied the Ross Tarbets, had been unable to do so on account of a sprained ankle—a trifle in itself, but warranted to become serious if walked on.

Seeing the envelope after lighting his candle, he opened it and read the note. His comments, in their order, were a "Hm—hm!" of concern and apprehension, another with some impatience in it, a grunt with nothing else, and a suppressed "Damn the woman!" He read it twice, and again, and went upstairs noiselessly.

Marianne was not asleep. She was wide awake, and wholesomely disposed to trust her husband, and tell the events of the evening at whatever risk. It would have to come out some time. Besides, the relief of knowing, either way! However, to tell him as natural sequence to an enquiry how things had gone with her was one thing; to rush the position another. She could not bring herself to call out to him—so little concerned about her as to make no such enquiry, and still scintillating, as it were, with sparks from the brilliancies of his evening's entertainment—to come into her room and hear the story. No, let him go—him and his Grosvenor Squares and Countesses!

Meanwhile he, however little weight he attached to anything Charlotte Eldridge said, conceived that he was on the safe side in paying attention to what she enjoined about a patient whom she had seen, and he had not. She might have been more definite about the nature of the attack. It was just like her to make a mystery of it. But it was evidently better to take her hint not to disturb his wife—now at near one in the morning! Challis made as little noise as possible, and got to bed in his own room, next to hers, without opening the door between lest he should wake her.

This was the text of Mrs. Charlotte's letter:

"She is *much* better, and will sleep. John and I both think you need not be the *least* alarmed. She has been too much excited lately, but will be all right now. Be very careful not to disturb her when you go up. I will try to come round in the morning. C. E."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW JIM RETURNED HOME, ALL BUT ONE LEG, AND LIZARANN CALLED ON HIM. HAD THE DEVIL GOT UNCLE BOB? HOW BRIDGETTICKS HAD HEARD OF A SCHEME FOR LIZARANN'S BENEFIT

LIZARANN'S deferred hopes of being allowed to rejoin her Daddy made her heart sick, but they never ceased to be hopes. No undercurrent of despair made itself felt. If Teacher's reassuring tones had not been sufficient, were there not the gentleman's, known to Lizarann's direct simplicity as Mr. Yorick—a designation remaining uncontradicted in his laughing acceptance of it. But he was going back to his own Rectory, in order that Gus should be once more in harness at St. Vulgate's—his own proper field of labour—during the approaching Holy Week. The invalid was enormously better; so he himself said.

However, Mr. Yorick was destined before his departure to put the crowning corner-stone on the fabric of Lizarann's affection for himself.

"Now, Miss Coupland," said he, "you sit still! And don't kick! And then tell me where you suppose you are going to be taken today."

Lizarann was cautious—wouldn't commit herself. "Who's a-going to tight me?" she asked, to get a clue.

"Me," said Mr. Yorick, falling to the grammatical level of his company. "I'm going to take you, as soon as ever you've guessed where. But only one guess, mind!"

Lizarann thought this shabby. But then, after all, when there is only one guess worth making, you may just as well use it up and have done with it. She looked from one of the faces that was watching to the other, and back; then risked her guess. "To Daddy in the Sospital!" she fairly shouted. But, alas!—disappointment was in store for her.

"No! Not Daddy in the Sospital. Guess again."

"Oh, Yorick, how can you? Playing with the child! I shouldn't have thought you could be so wicked. No, Lizarann dear, don't you believe him! Daddy's out of the Hospital, and you're

to go and see him. There! . . . I'm telling the truth, child!" For Lizarann, bewildered, still glances from one to the other.

"That's it, Lizarann. Not Daddy in the Sospital, but Daddy out of the Sospital. Now wrap up warm, and we'll go at once." A wild shriek of delight, an "undue subordination" of limbs, as in pictures of a debased period, and a rush for wraps, is followed, we are sorry to say, by some coughing. There is no such thing as flawless event anywhere.

"Oh no!—it won't do her any harm to go out," says Teacher. "Dr. Ferris said it might do her good if it got mild. Now, Lizarann!—Mr. Yorick's ready." For this Monday, known to the Rev. Gus as "Annunciation," and to most of his flock as Lady Day—a dreadful day when your rent isn't ready—had come as a herald of early spring, and a belief in violets was in the air.

"How far mustn't we go to the Sospital?" Lizarann speaks obscurely, but the meaning is clear to her conductor. How long is the road we are not going to the Hospital on?—surely that's clear.

"How far is it to Daddy? Daddy's at home." And, surely enough, when Mr. Yorick comes to Tallack Street he turns the corner. This bewilders Lizarann.

"But Aunt Stingy, she's took a place," she says. She is not certain of the exact sense of her words. The place might be Badajoz; or a Chancellorship of something, with a portfolio. But it doesn't matter! In either case, Aunt Stingy has left her home desolate—cookless! Again Lizarann is sympathetically understood.

"Your Daddy's being seen to, Miss Coupland. So he won't starve. Here we are!" And it is actually true! Lizarann is back in the home she has been eight weeks away from. For although of late the child had been allowed out, cautiously, no expedition had covered the half-mile between the school and Tallack Street. It is actually true that she is back there now, and wild with delight on the knee her Daddy still has left for her—in a rapture of tears and laughter that can just allow—but only just—the moderation of deportment called for when knees but lately the subjects of comminuted fractures are sat upon, even by very light weights.

Jim was garrulous about the Hospital, and the kindness and attention he had received there. "Yes, master, I was main sorry to come away, one side o' lookin' at it. I'll carry the doctor-gentleman and Nurse Lucy in my mind a long day on. Many's the time

I said to myself what I'd be tellin' of 'em to the little lass, home again. There was a bit o' sameness, as might be, when you think of it, and I got fixed uneasy-like about the lass. But, dear Lard bless you!—there was a many there worse off than me. Why, there was that pore chap you see, next bed off on the right! How might you suppose he come there?"

"Don't know, Jim; give it up! How was it?" Mr. Yorick does all the conversation. Lizarann will find her tongue presently, when she and Daddy are alone. At present she merely nestles to him, speechless, but blissful. Jim pursues his topic:

"As I made it out, master, it was this sort o' way: It was a kind o' small-arms factory, and there was two young wenches in the finishin' shop o' one mind about him. So it came to making ch'ice, for him. And one o' them, by name Clara, she warns him if she catches him sweethearting with her shopmate, she'd just mark him. Both decent girls, ye see! And she was all as good as her word, with a little pot of vitrol, right in his eyes! And he run, roaring mad with pain, and was caught in the machinery, and made a spoiled man of, as I reckon, all his days. Name of Linklater."

"What a terrible business! And it may have been *he* wasn't to blame, either."

"No—pore chap! He'd just no consolation, as you might say. I count myself a well-off man, set against him. Just wait a bit, master, and see me when I'm clear of them crutches. Once I get to use my stick again, anybody'll say, to see me: 'Why, there's a man ain't got anything the matter with him!' Nor yet I shan't have, to speak of!"

Athelstan Taylor could not help comparing Jim's resolute optimism—poor crushed wreck that he was!—with his sister's aggressive meekness and its pious claim to resignation or uncomplaining acquiescence in what was really a most happy release, though paraded as a cruel blow of Fate. But he could not stay to chat. He had to get back to St. Vulgate's; have a talk about the local flock, chiefly goats, with his friend, who had come home the evening before; pack his trunk, and get to Euston by one-thirty, with or without lunch. So he had only a few more hurried words with Jim.

"You'll think of what I was saying to you, Jim?"

"Sure, master!"

"And the lassie will just trot back to Miss Fossett, before it's dark. She'd better; the house might be cold here. Won't you, Lizarann?" Lizarann will, honour bright! "And how about those kisses I'm to take to my own little girls?" Payable on de-

mand, three crossed to the account of Phœbe, three to Joan; both names being now familiar to drawer. They are very loud—those kisses! Mr. Yorick says farewell and goes. Lizarann and her Daddy are again alone together. Eight whole weeks!

Oh, the hours that had seemed weeks, and the days that had seemed years, of waiting—waiting for this moment. And here it was! Daddy himself—come back out of that mysterious Hospital, where Lizarann had never been to see him! No wonder Lizarann did not know where to begin!

"Well, then, little lass! They haven't cut the little lass's tongue out amongst 'em?" A vehement headshake of denial precedes the first of the many things Lizarann can select, at random, from the multitude she has been resolving to tell Daddy all through this dreary period of privation.

"Teacher's new cat's black all over, only white on the stomach. Yass! And four of the kittens was drownded." Jim's sympathies are all ready for Teacher's cat's kittens. But he is not further called on to show them, for the child deserts the kittens almost instantly with "Oh, Daddy!—they took you to the Sospital."

"Coorse they did! How many policeman was there, lassie?"

"There was free I see first. And one he turned back down the road. Only there was men, as well as policemen."

"Chaps?"

"Yass! And there was the boys. And there was a woman. And there was another woman. Only not sober." So she didn't count, that one; was civilly disqualified, as it were. But was the sober one making herself of use?—Jim inquires. "She wasn't finding any fault," is all the testimony Lizarann can give. It seems to imply that the drunken one was indicting the executive. Lizarann finishes up her report: "Then there was Mother Groves, and the 'ot-chestnut stall at the corner, and the Young Varmint." For this is the name—no less—by which Frederick Hawkins is known to Lizarann and her Daddy.

"So there they all was, the biling of 'em," said Jim. "And there was Daddy, he'd got himself under a cart, and was a bit the worse by it. And his little lass, she come and kissed him, for to cheer him up—hay, lassie? Nor never cried, nor made no noise, like he told her not to."

Lizarann felt proud and happy. But she could not endure a position with the slightest false pretence in it. "I *did* cried, too," she said, "when I got so far as Dartley Street. And the boy, he says not to water-cart."

"The Young Varmint?"

"Yass! He toldited me his nime, he did. Hawkins—Frederick—Hawkins." Lizarann gives the exact words the boy had said. "And he says not to water-cart because of his aunt and uncle. Took to the Sospital quite flat they was, and begun singing a fortnight after!" Jim made concession to the Young Varmint—went so far as to say that he would not warm his hide for him this time, pr'aps! But he spoke without confidence of the like abstention being justified in the future.

"And then the lassie come home," said he. "And who come to the door?"

"Only me, Daddy!"

"Ah!—but t'other side—who come?"

"Uncle Bob didn't come to the door, only he set it just on the jar for me to push." Clearly "coming to a door" involves opening it wide for friends, or conferring with strangers to learn their reason for knocking or ringing. He who takes letters from a letter-box does not go to the door, even if he rushes downstairs like a madman when the postman's knock comes.

You may be sure that Lizarann's narrative that followed was full of little niceties of language, as spoken in Tallack Street. But you have had all the substance, and it need not be repeated in a new form.

Jim interspersed the story of the suppression of his delirious brother-in-law with exclamations of applause. Lizarann deserved what the players call "a hand" now and again for the vivacity of her descriptive report of the knife scene, with its dramatic ending of the application of the spent lucifer-match to Uncle Bob's hand. "He just give one scroatch, and there he was!" The introduction of a new self-explanatory word into the language alone deserved recognition. But Jim was not concerned with this. The conduct of Athelstan Taylor in a difficult position took his attention off minor points.

"I could have named the sart of man he was," said he, speaking half to himself, "from the feel of his hand, and maybe no more than just a 'Good-marning, mate!' by the way. And—but to think of it!—him a *parson!*" Jim couldn't get over this at all. He dwelt on the unfitness of the arrangement: "Now, if they'd 'a made pore Bob a parson, it might 'a broke him of his habit, and we'd not have had a bad miss of him on our side." He seemed to go on thinking of the subject in all its aspects—possibly of the utilization of ecclesiastical preferments as an antidote to drunkenness. But his fingers kept wandering about his little girl's face and head, as if to detect the change eight weeks had made in it.

"Uncle Bob's dead," said she, getting closer to say it, in a dropped, awe-struck voice.

"Ah—he's dead! He might have turned over a better day's work, mayhap! But Lard!—if you come to that, what a many of us mightn't! Poor Bob!"

"Does it hurt, Daddy?"

"Does what hurt, lassie?"

"Being dead."

"I reckoned you might mean my old leg. . . . No—it don't hurt, bless you!—not good little lassies, like mine. Other folks' I couldn't say about. They do say the Devil gets some on 'em, now and again. But he ain't a sartainty, himself. Though in coorse he manages all he can see his way to." That is to say that, unless handicapped by absolute non-existence, Satan might be trusted to do his best to get all bad little lassies.

Lizarann knew her catechism, and all that was necessary for her salvation, as school-knowledge. But she could not help being curious about these things as actual facts—knowledge-knowledge, one might say. Daddy could be relied on. Why not go straight to the point? So after some mere conversation-making about whether Mr. Winkleson had ever actually seen the Devil, Lizarann did so. "Has he got Uncle Bob?" she asked.

Her father's answer was not consistent with his previous expressions of opinion. "Never you fear for him, lass! The Devil don't take a poor chap for making mistakes with his grog. And as for his handling that knife a bit too free, I doubt the liquor had just got the mastery of him. And then, you know, lass, a man ain't himself when that happens. Ye may make your mind easy about Bob."

So Lizarann felt no further disquiet. Perhaps she was unconsciously soothed by observing the differences of opinion among her seniors—Mr. Winkleson, Teacher, and Daddy. The last was most likely to know, and gave the pleasantest answer to the problem.

"And there was my little lass out in the snow in her nightshimmee. To think of that! And her Daddy all the while no more use than a turned turtle!" This had to be explained, and the continuity of the conversation was risked, owing to Lizarann's womanly pity for turtles on their backs and helpless. However, this very pity caused reaction towards the previous questions, as Jim's situation had been no better than that of the turtles. Lizarann had to cry a little over this, and then renewed her petition—previous applications having been met by evasion or postponement—to actually see the wooden substitute for a limb that, in

spite of its boasted efficacy, compelled her Daddy to sit on a chair with more or less disguise of coat or blanket over it, both limbs being preferably kept horizontal for the present. But she might look at it, sure, might Lizarann; and, indeed, anyone would have thought, to see Jim exhibiting the business-end of a very new wooden leg, that some great improvement on a previous unsatisfactory condition had been attained. The little woman was incredulous about this; and, suspecting guile, put her Daddy through a severe cross-examination.

"'Sposin' you was obliged to it, Daddy; 'sposin' you had to walk all the way up Tallack Street, and all the way acrost Cazenove Street, and all the way acrost Trott Street to Blading Street where the cart was . . .?"

"Lard, lassie!—I could do it on my head, as the saying is, any minute o' the week!" But Jim demurs to an actual performance—says the doctor don't allow any tricks to be played. Lizarann gives the point up; but, oh dear!—how dreadfully afraid she feels that she is being practised on, and that in reality this shiny, well-turned, clean-leather-strapped contraption is, after all, no better—even perhaps worse—than an ordinary human foot. She will—she must!—elicit the truth somehow.

"Daddy!"

"Lassie!"

"When you was out on the yard-arm, and the wind was a-freshenin' up from the south . . ."

"To be sure, lass! Freshening to a three-quarter gale, and none too little canvas on her. . . . Easy ahead, lassie!" Jim is only helping the memory of the well-worn story, and the child accepts the prompting.

". . . None too little canvas on her. And Peter Cortright and Marmaduke Flyn, they was both on the mainyard reefin' alongside. And Peter Cortright he sings out to look . . ."

"Ah!—and your Daddy, he looked, and there he see her, the Dutchman, carrying all sail afore the wind. . . . Well, little lass, and what o' that?"

"When you was then, 'sposin' you'd only had a wooden leg!"

Jim's big laugh comes; and so lost is he in his little lass, so free from all thought of his own great privation, even in the face of the bygone time, that he can make it a heart-whole laugh and never flinch.

"'Sposin' I'd only had a wooden leg? Well—as I reckon it—I shouldn't have taken much notice. Not for one such! If you'd 'a named two wooden legs now, lassie! That might have consti-

tooted a poor kind of holt on a slippery yard. But I might have made a shift to do, even at that."

Lizarann was silenced, but not convinced. She resolved to thresh the subject out with Bridgetticks, whom she had secretly resolved to call upon on her way home. Bridget might know nothing about wooden legs, but she could cite a parallel experience, having herself walked on her brother's stelts, what he made out of two broomsticks and the foot'old nyled on, and mide syfe with a scrop of narrer iron hooping. She would refer it to Bridgetticks whether her brother—or a Circus, for that matter—could walk upon a bare yard, of which her own image was akin to a yard-measure, with a pair of stelts. If she, Bridget, felt confident of her brother's powers, no doubt Jim's assurance of his own might have been well grounded.

"Doesn't Aunt Stingy come to see to you, Daddy?" she asked anxiously. For she couldn't see no sign neither of breakfast, nor yet of dinner, nor yet of supper.

"No—lassie! Your aunt, she's got to 'tend on somebody else, away off to Wimbledon Common; and these here Simses—or Groombridges; I didn't catch the name right—she's got a short let to, are mostly away on a job. So she's packed together her bit of furniture, like you see it, and Mrs. Hacker, she's so obliging as to give me her time and attention; 'cos the master, ye see, he put the matter in trim for me. One don't look for hospital fare all the days of one's life."

Lizarann had heard where her aunt's "place" was, but her experience of places was of such as could be got to by half-past seven in the morning and come back to sleep at home. She thought now that she saw her way to enlightenment.

"Is where Aunt Stingy's gone where Mr. Winkleson lives?"

"Never a bit of it, lassie! He's by name Wilkins—Wilkinson Wilkins. This here's Wimbledon, a place with a Common to it. I went there once, for to see a review. I wouldn't mind going to see one again, and take the little lass." Perhaps he meant that his child's sight would serve for both; but more probably it was an instance of the strange way blind folk forget their own blindness. "Your aunty, she's come over once or twice, to pack up her traps and make straight, but I've got to put my dependence on Mrs. Hacker, so far as I can't shift for myself."

Lizarann derived from this and what followed one broad impression that the history of No. 27, Tallack Street had reached the end of a chapter—the one that contained her own biography to date. Another, that Aunt Stingy would be much less in evidence

for the future. Another, that a new force had come into her life and Daddy's—a welcome one, connected with Miss Fossett and Mr. Yorick. She had a happy guardian-angel sensation about this, and took it to her bosom with only one slight misgiving—that they were too easily duped by that ridiculous little pipe of Dr. Ferris's, that would hold up like a candlestick certainly, and you could blow through if he let you, but that was impotent for every other purpose.

If this story could ask its reader a question at this point, it would be: "Have you not noticed that Lizarann has scarcely coughed, all through this long interview with her Daddy?" It was the case, anyhow, and rather points to the truth of what a physician once said to ourself, the writer: "If in the early stages of lung-disease doses of unalloyed joy, of perfect happiness, could be administered three times a day to the patient, the later stages would be much rarer than they are at present." Certainly Lizarann's happiness had almost touched rapture, doubts about the wooden leg being the only alloy in the pure gold. And she certainly had coughed mighty little. Perhaps Dr. Ferris would have known what claim Lizarann had to be considered a case of the kind referred to.

The delightful time had to come to an end, and Lizarann found herself compelled to say good-bye. Daddy would have it so, although darkness was a long way off yet awhile. So she departed, bidden first to go to Mrs. Hacker's, and say to that good lady, that she was on no account to be in any tirrit to come away from her own supper to attend to Jim's, for that he had got his pipe, Lizarann having helped him to light it,—a thing to rejoice at, after that one defective usage of an Institution otherwise perfect—and wasn't in any driving hurry. This message Lizarann gave fairly honestly, in an interview with Mrs. Hacker, which—being repeated to Jim—may be held responsible for some borrowed phrases used lately to describe impressions on her mind of his surroundings. But she was not uneasy about him; her faith in Mr. Yorick was too great for that.

Having given her message, it did not strike her as a serious transgression to pay a visit to Bridgetticks. The injunction to go straight home covered the line of road—did not deal with continuity of movement. That seemed to her a just interpretation of it. But of course not stopping only five minutes!

So she went to the door of Bridgetticks, and shouted through its keyhole, in preference to knocking or ringing. But Bridget was assisting her mother at the washtub, and up to her elbers in suds; so she sent an emissary to the door instead of going herself. He

was very young, and was eating an apple; he was, in fact, too young and crude to be trusted to do like he was told; and he put a false construction on his mission, endeavouring to spit some of his apple through the keyhole, with a mistaken hospitality. His name was, as pronounced, Halexandericks. His bursts of laughter at each new failure of his attempts on the keyhole obscured the voice that was calling through it. He had a vacuous though not unpleasant laugh.

"I'll let you know directly, if you don't open that door," shouted his sister. She gave close particulars of the means she would resort to, but without effect. So she onsoapied the suds off of her arms, which she then placed akimbo, and went herself; not without a certain dancing effect, in consonance with a rhythmic utterance difficult to class as either song or recitation. Its words were certainly, "Waxy diddle-iddle-iddle, high-gee-wo!" ending in a pounce on Alexander, who spat his last piece of apple in his captor's face with a fiendish crow of delight. She wiped if off on his costume without comment.

"I seen my Daddy," said Lizarann, beaming, when the door was opened.

"I seen him afore ever you did," said Bridget, not to be outdone. "I seen him fetched along in a cab, last night just on seven-thirty. I seen him holped into the house."

"You story!" said Lizarann, hurt. "He can help himself, he can. He don't call for no help. Who was helping him?"

"Clapham Church Parsing—same as see your uncle Mr. Steptoe drownded—and rilewye-stytion cabman with rilings for trunks atop. Three thousand six hundred and thirty-two. Got him indoors they did."

Lizarann felt inclined to cry; this was a throw-back! But she wasn't one to give in easily. "My Daddy says he could swarm up the rigging as soon as not," said she. "Only the doctor he says for to keep quiet a bit, owing to prudence." When Lizarann repeated phrases lately heard, you would have thought, to listen to her, she was quite a big girl.

Now, it must not be supposed that Lizarann and Bridgetticks had not met during the past eight weeks. On the contrary, visits had been arranged, by request, even before Lizarann had been thought plenty well enough for school, only not to fret herself. These were the terms in which Miss Fossett's Anne confirmed that lady's opinion, and sanctioned a continued study of arithmetic and caligraphy. But intercourse during school-hours is fettered by formula; and when there's carpets and the bed made and all, you

have to set quiet, and it's not the same thing. So when these two found themselves once more in their old haunt, it was as though a ceremonial padlock had been removed from their tongues. Lizarann's improved exterior—for Teacher and Anne had reconstructed it—clashed a little with Bridgetticks; but the principle held good. Here, on Mr. 'Icks's doorstep, when an imputation of falsehood as an exordium to any reply seemed natural and genial, neither speaker felt bound to check her inspirations. Lizarann and Bridgetticks were themselves again.

They sat on the doorstep, cloze or no!—this referred to Lizarann's frock—and Bridget retained her younger brother, perhaps for slight rehearsals of the vengeance she had in store for him, he was that troublesome! Bridget smelt of soap and warm steam.

"*You* wented on stelts, and wooden legs is better than stelts!" Lizarann's uneasiness rankles, and she longs for public acknowledgment of her Daddy's prospects of rehabilitation.

"I shouldn't 'a said so," Bridget answered. "Stelts you catches hold atop. Wooden legs is balancin'. Stelts is your hands as well as your legs. Wooden legs you're stood-on-end and pitches yourself over, just as like as not. Not onlest you have crutches. Your Daddy he 's crutches, he has. I see 'em myself!" Lizarann could say nothing about Job's comforters, if only because, on the one occasion when she had heard them mentioned—by Mr. Winkleson—she had supposed them to be woollen ones. Besides, she was interested on another point.

"My Daddy hasn't no scrutches," said she. She had caught their name, without understanding it, when her father used it; and now decided on denying them provisionally, pending inquiry into their nature. "What's a scrutch?"

"Oh, you little ignorance!" said Bridget. "Never to know what a crutch is, at your age!" She appealed to her infant brother to say, directly minute, what a crutch was, or she would take advantage of his unprotected youth to smack him. His reply, needing interpretation, was that it was a penny-farden. Halexandericks had evidently a turn for negotiation. His sister cast him off, telling him to go and ply by himself on the pivement, and then resumed: "If you'd 'a knowed 'em when you seed 'em, you might have kep' your eye open, and took note."

Lizarann, skipping the unnecessary, immediately replied: "Daddy said they was second-hand, and to go back when done with."

Bridget skipped some more. "Very well, then!—you see them cross-pieces for the 'ands? . . . Very well, then!—there's a

lather pad for under the shoulder-j'int, and they're n'isy going down the street. Now don't you go to say I never told you." There was nothing really unkind or overbearing in Bridget's peculiar manner; it was only the strong working of a leading mind. She was, in fact, a very clever child, being less than two years her friend's senior.

She saw that Lizarann was downcast by hearing of the crutches, never having rightly appreciated the position, and set herself good-naturedly to consolation. "It's always tender where your leg's took off," said she, "and you want something to ketch the weight, walking." She spoke as if she had often had legs off. "But my father, he says it's nothing to get the hump about, with a little accommodatin'. And I seen a man with one leg and one crutch took two coppers to tike him to the stytion." Lizarann brightened visibly. "You see what your Daddy he'll look like when he's been a month in the country!"

Obviously this was repetition of something said by an older mouth. "Who toldited anything about the country?" said Lizarann.

"Clapham Church Parsing. Him as see Mr. Steptoe drownded. I heard him telling. 'You see,'—he says to your Daddy—'you see what you'll feel like when you've been a month in the country,' he says. 'You do just as I tell you,' he says, 'and I'll make it all square for you,' he says. And then he says you to go too."

"Me!" Lizarann exclaimed, open-mouthed with amazement. And then Bridgetticks gave more particulars of what really was a bout of careful eavesdropping on her part, she having succeeded in overhearing a good deal of conversation between Jim and the Rector of Royd, who had accompanied him from the Hospital the night before. It pointed to a scheme by which Lizarann was to be taken in at the Rectory, and carefully nurtured—treated, in fact, for a disease which had existence only on the authority of that lying little stethoscope of Dr. Ferris's! However, as long as no project involved a new separation from Daddy, what did Lizarann care?

Besides, look at the new experience of a world she had been so little in—it was glorious to think of! She was not so much dazzled as she might have been had every minute of her life been passed—for instance—in Drury Lane. She and Bridget had both benefited by school-treats. "I've been in the country," she said. "It's at Dorking."

But Bridget had a larger horizon. "There's more sorts than that," said she, "without taking count of foring parts. Like you'll

find when you done some more geography." Lizarann felt awe-struck.

But it was getting along towards six, and she knew she ought to be reporting herself to Teacher. Perhaps she would have delayed still later, if she had not become anxious to ask that lady point-blank about this fascinating bucolic scheme. As it was, she was received with some displeasure—on her own behalf entirely—and decided to postpone investigations. We, for our part, have never believed that that extra half-hour of exposure to the evening air made in the long run the slightest difference.

CHAPTER XXII

THE EXACT STORY OF CHALLIS'S FIRST WIFE'S FIRST MARRIAGE. HOW HE AND MARIANNE MISSED THEIR EXPLANATION. CHARLOTTE THE DETECTIVE. CHALLIS'S SECOND COURTSHIP, IN A NUTSHELL

If there had been no cause of irritation between Alfred Challis and his wife about his relations with Grosvenor Square, it would have mattered much less what he kept back from her of his previous history. And if he had taken her fully into his confidence about the story of his early marriage with her sister, his relations with Grosvenor Square would have been much less capable of embitterment and misinterpretation. But his palpable concealment of Heaven-knew-what from one who conceived she had of all others the fullest right to know it, played the part, in this domestic misunderstanding, of poor Desdemona's bad faith towards her father. "She has deceived her father, and may thee," said Brabantio.

Could Marianne have known *what* Heaven knew, she would probably have held her husband blameless, if ill-judging; though she might have felt very little leniency towards her sister for contracting a marriage unknown to her family. But the ground was not in order for the sowing of a crop of explanation, to be reaped as a harvest of reconciliation. It was cumbered with the clover her husband was supposed to be enjoying at the Acropolis Club and elsewhere, and choked with a creeping weed of Jealousy unacknowledged. And as the trivial things of life are always the ones that play the biggest parts, so that unfortunate resolution not to disturb his wife, when Alfred Challis came home from the Club dinner, had to answer for quite ten times its fair share of the events that followed. No doubt her silence was a little vindictive—it would have been so easy to give a hint that she was awake—but the truth is it had very little to do with the matter. What had a great deal to do with it was the fact that Mr. Challis had *not* been enjoying himself. Had it been otherwise, he would have felt apologetic; the monitor he would not admit was his conscience would have prescribed amends to Marianne for contriving to be so jolly without her. But she had no guess that her Grosvenor Square

enemy was laid up with a sprained ankle, any more than he had that the new cook had been the means of bringing to light a great deal—the worst half in disjointed fragments—of a story his good if mistaken intentions had concealed. For, needless to say, the actual story was still very obscure to her; and Mrs. Eldridge, though clever enough, was a biassed assistant in its elucidation.

Lest it should still be equally obscure to the reader, let him note its broad facts as follows: Edward Keith Horne married, or went through a marriage ceremony, with Kate Verrall, a governess at the house of a coal-merchant named Hallock. Six weeks later he went away to New York, promising an early return; there was some pretence of winding up a relative's affairs. He repudiated his wife shortly after; as she became convinced, and as Challis, his friend, also believed, on legally good grounds. As we have already said, Challis may have met conviction half-way, being in love with the girl himself. Of course, it was he whose name Mrs. Steptoe had remembered wrongly as Harris. And, equally of course, the miserable reprobate of Athelstan Taylor's painful experience at St. Brides was Horne, who succeeded with what was left of his mouth in nearly articulating his true name rightly. "Kay Thorne" was close to the truth, considering the circumstances. This story is fortunate in having very little to do with this man; as his young wife, or victim, may also have been in having for her only adviser a youth with a strong interest in urging her passive acceptance of her position. If only half the betrayed girls in the world could have such an adviser ready to hand! Alas!—how seldom is one found with the courage to say, "Think yourself at least in luck, silly girl, that you are not fettered for life to this lout or devil! Hug to your heart this one consolation, that though you have bought your experience of him, and what he calls love, dear, you have escaped scot-free of the blessed sacrament of marriage!" Too often the poor thing finds herself alone in the desert—the desert where correct expressions grow—sin, and shame, and penitence, and so on—and where marriage-lines and marriage-settlements make oases, from which she is excluded, for the Grundy family to breed in.

Perhaps Challis had a concealed motive for his decision when, at the time he married Kate's sister, he made up his mind to treat the whole story as a sealed book. But, even with none, was he wrong, knowing that his wife elect was quite convinced that no belonging of hers had ever set foot outside her particular Grundy oasis? Remember, too, that he was only pursuing the course he would have held it a point of honour to pursue if he had never mar-

ried Marianne at all. Why should his marriage with her make it incumbent on him to dig up a story that his wife had already passed years in ignorance of, without any living creature being perceptibly the worse? No doubt Mrs. Eldridge would have said, with a portentous gush of deep conviction, "She ought to have been told." But why?

At least, the story shows that Challis himself had nothing disgraceful to conceal, and that all his actions were dictated by consideration for others. It is more than likely that an explanation, had the position favoured it, would have ended—if not by placing him in the position of a hero—at least by a discharge with a first-class certificate from the high court of Morality. But the atmosphere teemed with suggestions of malpractice undefined, and the master-hand of Mrs. Eldridge made the most of them.

No explanation took place between Challis and Marianne at the only time when it was easily possible—on the morning after we saw them last. Explanations are like strawberries—bottled up, they spoil. Now, whatever chance there would have been of Challis hearing of the photograph mystery and Mrs. Steptoe's memories was cancelled by the malign arrival on the scene of Mrs. Eldridge and her John, bound for his daily toil at St. Martin's-le-Grand. So, you see, it was early in the morning.

Charlotte had been so uneasy about dear Marianne that she felt she must come over to find out. It was so entirely unexpected. She had been laughing and joking the minute before. So Charlotte thought fit to say, and Challis, to whom it was said privately, detected a flavour of an unasked-for assurance that Marianne was cheerful in his absence. "It" had come quite suddenly, when Marianne went away to speak to Martha. Challis had no means of guessing what "it" had been, except Mrs. Eldridge's note, and a certain demeanour of his wife's, which no doubt had to answer for an expression of Master Bob's, in secret conclave with his sister Cat. According to him, his mater was savage, if you liked, this morning. Challis had gone to his wife's room to ask about "it" as soon as he heard that the servant had abated; and had been told, coldly, that nothing had been the matter that Marianne knew of. His production of Mrs. Eldridge's note was met by, "That's just like Charlotte!" He waited a few moments for counter-inquiry about himself, rather anxious to tell what a failure the Acropolis had turned out; but no curiosity was shown, and he went back to his own room to dress, saying nothing further. Had he been wise, he would have sat on the bed in his pyjamas, and said he meant to stop there until the mystery was accounted for.

Matters got definitely worse when Mrs. Eldridge, whose invasion occurred just at the end of breakfast, took advantage of a chance exit of Marianne's, in connection with housekeeping matters, to follow her and contrive a sympathetic interview within hearing of the two gentlemen. Not that a word was audible, but anyone with the slightest knowledge of human nature would have discerned that one of the speakers, the tone of whose voice was mellow with the opposite sexes of the persons she was speaking of, was recognizing the patience and forbearance of the other under trials, and exhorting her to renewed efforts in the same direction.

"What do you suppose was the matter?" Challis was filling his pipe, as he asked this question of Mr. Eldridge.

"Mean to say you don't know?"

"I certainly don't. Nobody has told me."

"I ain't any help. Don't ask me—that's all! Don't put it on me to say!" Mr. Eldridge, however, implies that his attitude is one of Discretion, not Ignorance. For he closes one eye, an action that can bear no other interpretation. He also shakes his head continuously and gently, as one who would convey to an interviewer the hopelessness of cross-examination.

"I suppose it was nothing but an upset. The weather's trying." It had really been unusually normal. But Mr. Challis was talking as gentlemen do when they are lighting a pipe, and thinking more about whether that's enough than about the topic in hand.

"Stomach!" said Mr. Eldridge, as nearly in a monosyllable as spelling permits. He repeated the word just half-a-dozen times in a run; then added this rider: "Say nervous system, when a lady. Puts it better."

"Something of that sort!" The pipe draws, and the smoker ought to look happy. He doesn't. But, then, the sympathetic murmur, with its unguessed import, of Mrs. Eldridge afar, is reaching his ears. Sudden appreciative gushes, and the firm tone of sound advice, are very unsettling when inarticulate. Cannot that fool John be made to throw a light on the mystery? Try again! "Charlotte told you all about it, John; you know she did!" The Christian names give cordiality. But John is not to be cajoled.

"Tellin's is tellin's," says he; and goes so far as to place a finger against one side of his nose, in token of perspicuity. "Put it at stomach! . . . Got the right time?"

"That clock's right."

"Then Greenwich is fast. Must see about gettin' off! Gettin' off—gettin' off—gettin' off!" Mr. Eldridge's repetitions no doubt have some bearing on his relations with his fellow-man, but it is not

easy to say what. They seem to sanction concurrent event; that is the most one can say. He continued his last repetition even after he had taken his leave, saying he wouldn't wait for Lotty, *because* she was going the other way, and seeming quite content with his speech-work.

Hence, when Lotty reappeared hurriedly, and was surprised at his departure, having something she *must* say to him before he went, Challis got very little speech of the lady. All her limited time allowed her to say was that she had had a long talk with dear Marianne, and she was quite sure "it" would be all right now. Only she was convinced it would be so much better to say nothing to her—just to take no notice of "it" and let "it" drop. However, rush she must, or she would never catch John! And rush she did. And Challis grunted, but retired to his own room, and was soon absorbed in the Ostrogoths.

A stand-up fight between Titus and his wife at this period might have saved the situation. It would not have mattered one straw whether it had turned on Grosvenor Square or on the unsolved mystery of the photograph. Anything that led to fiery outspeech would have been a precursor of reconciliation.

It is difficult to tell anything with certainty about any love-affairs. Nobody ever knows anything at all about them; even the two constituents, if called on to explain and analyze themselves, make but a poor show. We know pretty well what the Poet is good for at a pinch. And as for the Man of the World and the Man in the Street—well!—all we can say is, give us the Woman of the World or the Woman in the Street; preferably the latter. But the duty of the story, in reference to the psychology of Challis's two marriages, is to tell what has come to light, or seems most probable—what it thinks or believes, not knows, about the depths of an unfathomable ocean.

Challis, then, being a young man irreligiously brought up—that is to say, made to understand that he was responsible for his behaviour, and that no attempt to shift his sins off on other shoulders would be held fair play—found himself at five-and-twenty in a position that would have been a sore trial to the strongest fortitude. He was, if not actually left in charge of a friend's recently married wife, at any rate in her close confidence; and, after her return to a home and friends from whom her marriage was a secret, the sole depository of that secret. He might never have fallen in love with Kate had they met on fair ground. But a youth unfamiliar with girl-kind that is not of his own belongings—sisters,

to wit, and cousins earmarked as sisters—is always in danger if even a moderately pretty or attractive outsider takes him into her confidence. Challis's danger was all the greater owing to his terror of being treacherous to his friend. Perhaps, if the avowal of his passion had been legitimately possible, he might never have suspected himself of any passion to avow. But when you believe your conscience will brand you as a traitor to all eternity if you pursue a particular course, you naturally want to pursue it.

So it was a great relief to him when a letter, shown to him alone by the terrified girl, disclosed the atrocious deception that had been practised on her, and the miserable position in which she was placed. No wonder the avowal came. Our own belief is that it would have come, exactly the same, to a girl of almost any personality. Nothing could have averted it, short of a hare-lip, an isolated projecting tusk, or—suppose we say—onions. And this girl had pretty lips, and the interview occurred after tea.

Information is scanty about what followed. But no serious inquiry can have been made into the truth of Mr. Horne's accusation against himself. The exact nature of it—the particular illegality he appealed to in support of his case—does not come to light. There really was no one to inquire, except Challis, unless the whole story had come out. It did not. A twelvemonth later Kate exchanged the name of Verrall—whether rightly or wrongly borne—for that of Challis, and two years later Master Bob was born, and his poor little mother had died of him. He showed no compunction, but kicked and made a horrible noise.

His father was only reasonably overwhelmed by his loss. It may be that, like many another inexperienced youth, he had not reckoned with the difficulties this world's Bobs and their like are apt to inflict on their family before they are formally enrolled in it, especially when the mothers they select have nervous temperaments. Challis felt, when he was left alone with the baby, that he had had a fierce tussle with Fate, and had come out of it severely punished. Probably, if his wife had survived, and Bob had lived to be a year old, without alarms about another brother or sister, his father would have been much less easily reconciled to his widowerhood. He would then have had a short draught of the nectar of life at its best; that is, if—as we suppose—a tempestuous excitability, which appeared two or three months after marriage, was entirely due to Master Bob. Mental unsoundness seems to have been denied; but, then, surely someone must have affirmed it?

As it was, Bob did a good deal—the best he could—to make up for the mischief he had done. He was a satisfaction to his father;

and, being taken in hand by his Aunt Marianne, then a girl of eighteen, and in a sense adopted by her, became a strong connecting link between the two, and was really the agency that brought about Challis's second marriage four or five years later. It would have happened sooner, no doubt, but for the anomalous and grotesque condition of English Law, which, till a year or so since, made certain marriages diversely legal in different portions of the British Empire. The Angels might weep, but if they cried their eyes out it would still remain impossible for a man to wed with his deceased wife's sister on certain square yards of it. He had to be domiciled in a special portion of the Empire on which the sun never sets to do that, and yet live ungrundied. Marianne was slow to give in on the point. She had, in common with many of her countrywomen, a religious conviction—a belief in the plenary inspiration of any book in a religious binding—you know the sort. She may have had others, but the qualifications of her intelligence were not such as to enable bystanders to discover their exact nature. Alfred Challis certainly never did so. And this religious conviction did not give way until her brother-in-law deliberately wrote formal proposals to a Miss Bax, with elbows, whom she hated; to a fascinating young Jewish widow, who had lawlessly said she would just as soon marry a Gentile as a Jew; and to the daughter of a Unitarian minister. He took the three letters to her, and said, "Now, Polly Anne, which is it to be? You may burn two of these; the other one I post." Polly Anne promptly destroyed the two last; her brother-in-law was blasphemous and impious enough already without that, she said. But Emma Bax!—no, when she came to think of it, it was impossible! However, Challis directed the letter and, as it were, invested a postage-stamp in intimidation; so there was nothing for it but to throw her arms around his neck and surrender at discretion. Anything rather than Emma Bax! He kissed her tears away and said: "You know, Polly Anne, after all, you're only poor Kate's half-sister, when all's said and done!" This she found very consolatory.

It was a pity, at this juncture, that the girl's mother was a fool. Had she been a reasonably good guardian for her daughter, she would at least have insisted on the nuptials being celebrated in a land where the marriage would have been held lawful. But she contented herself with condemning the union in the abstract, and flinging Holy Writ—also in the abstract—at its perpetrators. The Bench of Bishops would have done the same, no doubt; but that Bench would have forbidden the banns, to a certainty. As she re-

mained silent, and no outsider could be expected to screw himself up to prohibition-point in the case of a half-sister, the pair were wedded by a priest who knew nothing of them beyond their bare names, and never really became man and wife, as they would have done if they had been married sixty-odd years before; unless, indeed, some busybody had obtained a decree annulling the marriage —as the Law, with a keen sense of fun, directed in the days of our great-grandfathers.

The notable point in the psychology of these two marriages surely is that in neither case was the bride the free selection of the bridegroom, except in the sense that he was absolutely free to take or leave either. He never, strictly speaking, fell in love at all. He found himself in a well, and love trickled in. But even in this metaphor he never was over head and ears. He never wished to be a glove on any hand, to press any cheek. To call him passionately in love with either of the two sisters would have been just as absurd as to say that Romeo "got very fond" of Rosaline and Juliet. Exchange the phrases, and each fits its place. Challis got very fond of both his wives, being an affectionate sort of chap. But he remained a stranger to the divine intoxication which is known in its fulness only to Romeo and his like, and which some men never know at all.

Short of this last sort may often be found men who have escaped Romeo's experience early in life, yet whom some cunning context of circumstance may just upset, and convert for the moment into idiots as infatuated as the young Montague and Capulet we have cried over so many a time. For our own part, we count none quite safe from what is really an ennobling phase of sheer madness; except it be, for instance, a Charles the Second, a Rochester, a Tiberius, or a Joe Smith. *Id genus omne* is safe enough.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW CHALLIS CALLED ON MISS ARKROYD IN GROSVENOR SQUARE. A SPRAINED ANKLE. ON THE EDGE OF A PRECIPICE. KING SOLOMON AND HIS DJINN BOTTLE

Mr. Elphinstone, responsible for No. 101, Grosvenor Square, and the morals and dignity of the family that dwelt in it, was not without uneasiness about the literary and artistic circles that his two young ladies had elected to move in. This description is superficial; it judges from externals. Say that Mr. Elphinstone's appearance conveyed that he, like Atlas, had the whole house on his shoulders—was practically answerable for the honourable repute of all his subordinates, and morally for that of his superiors. That was the construction Alfred Challis felt obliged to put on such flawless shaving; such a weighty deference to the slightest personalities—his own, for instance—on production of adequate credentials; such a hypnotic suggestion of having foregone an episcopate elsewhere to take service with a beloved family whose interests he had at heart. It was a construction not free from the derision Mr. Challis was in the habit of meting out to dignitaries of all sorts. In this case he may not have been free from personal feeling; for he must have been aware that Elphinstone regarded him as an interloper—one who outraged the sacred traditions of the household, calling at unearthly hours in a soft felt hat, and smoking on the doorstep until compelled to throw away too much cigar by hearing that the family was at home.

This is substantially what was happening about two hours after Mr. Eldridge had declined to shed any light on anything at all, and his wife had departed enjoining silence about Heaven-knows-what. Challis, *désœuvré* by the mystification, had found himself unable to invent any single thing a Scythian mercenary would have been likely to say in English blank verse, and an approach towards Marianne of a conciliatory sort was met by, "I must see Steptoe now about the dinner." Unfortunately, this speech was absolutely passionless; if it had only been tempersome, there might have been a row. And a row—as the Press delights to phrase it—might have spelt salvation. But Challis could see in it nothing

that justified more than a languid "All right!" on his part. And he had departed to the banks of the Danube again, with no better success than before.

Presently his wife knocked at his door in an excluded, ostracised sort of way, and he got up to open it. She was dressed for going out. "I won't disturb you," she said. "Don't come out. I only wanted to say that if the man comes about the gas you had better see him, because he won't believe Steptoe, and the meter is certainly out of order. That's all."

It was one of those queer little turning-points of existence. Challis was not ready with any reply that would have caused a moment's delay and saved the situation. Before he could manage more than general assent, Marianne was gone, too far for anything short of demonstrative recall. He did not see his way to this, and the chance was lost.

He was unable to work, and wanted to go out. But he had been, as it were, put in bond on account of the gas-man, who wouldn't believe. He failed to console himself by an accusation of Sadduceeism against that functionary, and repeated Blake—

> "The bat that flits at close of eve
> Comes from the brain that won't believe"

—without benefit to his ill-temper. Then he impatiently wrote a note about the meter to leave with Steptoe, to whom he said with immovable gravity: "Is it a Sapphic or an Alcaic meter, do you know?" Aunt Stingy's reply, without a shadow of suspicion in her voice, "I could not say, myself, sir, but The Man would be sure to know," put him in a much better humour. He actually chuckled as soon as he was sure the good woman was out of hearing.

He wanted a book from the London Library, and could get it easily and come back to lunch. He really did not admit to himself, when he left home, that he had any good grounds for suspecting that he meant to call in Grosvenor Square to inquire about that sprained ankle. He took pains to disbelieve in any such intention till he had got the volume he was in want of from the Library, and then it occurred to him that it would be unfeeling not to inquire after the victim of an accident which might prove serious, after all. His image of the injury done became very bad as he told his cabman to drive to 101, Grosvenor Square. Was he aware that he welcomed this solicitude about the sprained ankle because it disguised, for the comfort of his conscience, his disposition to call upon its owner?

The only palliative to the disgust of that doorstep in Grosvenor

Square—to which it is time to return—was that this time Mr. Challis was not actually smoking on its brink; as, when his cab pulled up, he was descried, before he had time to descend, by Mr. Elphinstone himself, who had come out tentatively into the Universe to look round at it, with a sense upon him of possible sudden retractation through the open door, like a hermit-crab. A Piccadilly hansom, equal to bespoke for Royalty, had in this case levelled its occupant up. Even so a growler of the deepest dye, lurching, springless, effluvial, knacker-destined as to its horse, drags down the noblest blood that dares to ride in it—yes! even a Duke's; but who can cite a case in point? Only, when Mr. Elphinstone crossed the pavement, he did it to confer with the contents of the cab, as such; not with Mr. Alfred Challis, thank you!

He was reassuring about the ankle; a slight strain that with care—his own and Sir Rhyscombe Edison's—would disappear in a day or two. Oh no!—in answer to inquiry—Miss Arkroyd had not been compelled to keep her bed; a phrase that entered a respectful protest against "stop in bed," the coarse, familiar expression Mr. Challis had made use of. But he was, after all, a married man with a family, so it might be overlooked, this once. He went on to say that Miss Arkroyd, he believed, was up, though nursing the injured limb on a sofa. He arrived, after responsible doubts, at the conclusion that he might send Mr. Challis's card up, in case of any message. Delicacy dictating a female emissary, Samuel was despatched with it to Miss Arkroyd's maid; who presently, being an unpolished sample from the dairy at Royd, came down and said briefly that Mr. Challis was to come up. Mr. Elphinstone's expression was well-restrained protest.

But it may not have been so much the little dairy-maiden's bluntness that provoked it, as an indescribably small shade of demeanour of Mr. Challis's. As the girl came along the passage, and before she spoke, Challis threw his cigar away, or the two-thirds that was left of it. Such a little matter! But unless he had known what she was going to say, he surely would have kept it till he did, to finish at leisure. How came he to be so positive?

Anyhow, there it was!—the cigar—not half smoked, on the pavement when the house door closed. And the cabman's eye rested on it. And he spoke thus to a butcher's boy, who appeared from an area: "Wipe your fingers on your apron, young dripping, and just hand me up that cigar, and I'll see if I'll smoke it. I ain't proud. Only don't you discharge off any of your natural grease upon it!"

To be addressed, even in disparaging terms, by such a hansom,

was flattering to this butcher-boy's vanity, and he did not resent it. "Licked, but not busted, that I can see!" was his comment as he handed the cigar up to the cabman, who went on with it, contentedly.

It is two months of the story since it saw, or rather heard of, Miss Arkroyd and Mr. Challis driving up to this door after midnight in another hansom. All that it said, or implied, at that time amounted to little more than that a not very strait-laced lady and gentleman had been rather free and easy over some theatrical schemes interesting to both, and that the lady's sister, being less free or less easy, had intimated that the conduct of the two might be laced a little more straitly, with advantage. It is over six months of the story since they discussed "The Spendthrift's Legacy" and "Ziz" in the garden at Royd. If Charlotte Eldridge, as an authority, had been asked, "On which of these two occasions, madam, should you suppose the chances were best of this gentleman and lady supplying you with a story made to your hand, akin to the one Robert Browning never went on with?" what would her answer have been?

Our own impression is that at this present date of writing, when Challis, smelling rather strongly of tobacco, is following the little ex-dairymaid up the second flight of stairs to what is known as the young ladies' sitting-room—at this very moment, with the cabman making the most of his inherited Havana, and Judith forming to receive visitors, the position would have been much less likely to supply copy for Mrs. Eldridge than the previous one, but for one thing. Challis's relations with Marianne were, at the moment—say—of the parroquets, intact. What were they now? . . .

They were *something,* or Challis's last unspoken speech to himself on the stairs would not have been, "At any rate, it isn't my fault!" It needed the atmosphere of Judith—amused, if irritated, at her absurdity in getting a sprained ankle—to enable him to shake free—though always under protest—of the Hermitage.

"Wasn't it ridiculous of me! . . . No!—don't sit there; I can't see you. . . . Wasn't it ridiculous of me to do this—just now of all times in the year?"

"I thought you were a passive agent. I mean I didn't know that you *did* do anything."

"No more I did! No more than one does. You know what I mean?"

"Couldn't be better expressed! Like when one chokes and thinks one could have helped it, and what a fool one is! But how did it happen?"

"Perfectly simple! I was getting down out of the carriage, and forgot to think about my feet. Fenton Arkroyd was passing, and if he's not taken notice of he's sensitive, because he married a laundress, or something. So I forgot to think about my feet. It might have been so easily avoided—with a little common-sense."

"So might so many things." Challis isn't the least clear how the common-sense would act in the cases he is talking at—the plagues that beset his own path. But what a capital thing to say!—on general grounds, of course, with a little esoteric meaning all to oneself.

Judith, perhaps, thinks it too early in the morning for ethics, as she changes the conversation. "How did you like my little maid?" she says, keeping her eyes closed; which seems absurd after stipulating for visibility on Challis's part. But it all belongs to a certain imperious humour in the grain of her character. And rights of translation are reserved. She can open them if she pleases.

"She's new, isn't she? Jolly little party!" Thus Challis.

"You're not warm enough! Didn't you want to kiss her?"

"Yes, badly—when she gave your message—half-way up. . . ."

Judith opened her eyes. You can't laugh with your eyes shut; you snigger. "She really gave it? Do tell me exactly! What did she say?" she asks delightedly, keeping her eyes open to hear the answer.

"She turned round on the landing, and became for the moment a mere mass of blooming conscience. . . ."

"Is that—excuse me!—to be taken as *language,* or how?"

"No, no!—literally . . . Blown flowers of intense truthfulness, and buds on the burst. . . . Well!—she *said,* as near as I remember: 'Miss Arkroyd said if Mr. Challis didn't smell too strong of smoke, only Mr. Elphinstone wasn't to hear.' And then she got away up the second flight with some alacrity. I thought she was afraid I might propose investigation, and Elphinstone was still in the neighbourhood."

Judith is intensely amused. "I shall have to give that child one of Sibyl's bead necklaces. Turquoise. It goes with her eyes exactly—they have just the violet tinge." She closed her own again on the slight subject, but it has suggested a weightier one. "Couldn't you give Estrild a little Visigoth *ingénue*—I mean Ostrogoth—to wait upon her?"

"What!—and train the little Rankshire beauty to the part? Think of her parents—the stage!—merciful Heaven! . . ." But Challis stops suddenly, discomposed by a discomposure in his hearer.

"Never mind," says she, shaking it off. "You didn't mean it. You're forgiven! Go on."

"I naturally didn't think of it from that point of view. The cases are so entirely different."

"Never mind!" Judith repeats her words with more emphasis. "You *are* forgiven. Now go on about the Ostrogoths."

"I could put the little beauty in; she would be very useful as a set-off to Estrild. Besides, I want to get rid of Isarnes the Cappadocian, and she would work in . . ."

Judith interrupts him, calling to the little attendant, who comes in answer from somewhere within hearing. "Child!" she says—"bring me that hand-mirror off my dressing-table," and when it comes, continues, interrupting a recommencement of the Cappadocian, "That's right!—give it me. Now put your face over my shoulder and look in."

The order is complied with, but an inexplicable apology follows: "Please, miss, I know. Because I looked. And I've tried monkey-soap, and it won't wash out." The seriousness of the young voice is heart-rending. Judith bursts out laughing, but consoles: "It wasn't that, child! But I like you to be a funny little goose, so don't stop! Now take away the glass, and let the monkey-soap alone, for Heaven's sake! . . . You got a good view, Mr. Dramatist? . . . Well!—you saw what I mean. Now, tell me what you were saying about the Cappadocian."

"Why, you see, he ought to make a showy end, after dyeing his hands in the blood of so many inoffensive persons, and killing a Sarmatian bison with a single blow in the arena. He might be just giving a hideous laugh of triumph, and his innocent victim might be struggling vainly in the grasp of a giant—it would be Jack Potter; you know what a biceps he has—and a sudden arrow would be shot from across the Danube and pierce his brain through the eye. . . ."

"Of course—shot by What's-his-name?—the man that wouldn't embrace Christianity, but does heroic deeds. You know, Challis, you'll have to make him embrace Christianity. What *is* the use of being unpopular?"

"Of course he embraces Christianity in the end. The high-priest or bishop elevates a crucifix. I've been trying to think of a good name for him. Ingomar or Anthrax. . . ."

"That won't do. It's what the sheep die of. How would Zero do?"

"Something between Zeno and Nero. Very good name, only the thermometer's been beforehand with us. . . ." And so the con-

versation ran on for a little, throwing an interesting light on the human drama in its connection with Gibbon. But it was a conversation that murmured continually: "You know you did not allow me to go my own way because you thought I was going to be disagreeable. Finish me piecemeal as I arise, or take the consequence—misgiving on either part about what the other did or didn't think." Judith, who, after all, was the one responsible for the discontinuity, gave in to these murmurs first, and harked back.

"I know you think, Challis, that I am keeping the *madre* and papa in the dark about what I mean to do. But I'm not, because Sibyl knows, and *they* can know perfectly well if they like; it's only that they don't choose to know. Besides, what on earth *is* the use of making scenes, when I've made up my mind? I'll confess when the time comes."

The levity or laxity of Challis's voice is gone from it in his reply, scarcely a sequel to the words just spoken: "When I said that about your little maid, I had no thought that it could possibly apply in your case. The child, remember, is under the legal control of parents. How old is she?—sixteen? . . ."

"Yes, perhaps—not more, certainly. You mean that I'm . . ."

"Over twenty-one. I don't say you would assert a legal independence against the wishes of your family. But it separates the two cases. I wouldn't have any hand in getting a very young girl on the stage in any case. And I think I should avail myself of the existing legal . . . well!—call it pretext, if you will . . . to excuse myself from doing so."

"That's just like you, Challis! You really are a disciple of Mr. Brownrigg's Groschenbauer—what's his name? You deride every existing usage, merely because it exists, and then you make use of it for your own purposes! You're just the same about the parsons, and all religion! You tolerate it, or pose as tolerating it, because you dislike wickedness on the whole, and can't see your way to a substitute—not even to a Metaphysical Check."

Challis's laugh left his face twinkling with paradoxical intention. "I believe I am the only known example," said he deliberately, "of a person apparently of sound mind who has never once succeeded in justifying a single position he has taken up. . . ."

"Don't talk like Felixthorpe! At any rate, you can justify the position you have taken up that I'm more than twenty-one."

"Because you told me!"

"Yes—the day after my birthday. I was twenty-six the day you came to Royd. I remember telling you the day we went to the

Rectory. Six months ago! Oh dear!—how the time does run away!"

In obedience to a mysterious law, which dictates that no speech of any good-looking woman to any passable man shall mean to him nothing beyond its obvious meaning, this little reminiscence of Judith assumed an identity. It reminded Challis of the existence of that soul-brush, which had become—it is useless to deny it—so much a part of his relation with Judith that he had ceased to hear the machinery. *He* denied it, mind you!—denied it systematically. Yet he was indignant with anything that reminded him that it was time to deny it. Plague take this necessity for walking guardedly! How acceptable it would have been to be able to say, "*How* we enjoyed that walk back through the sunset!" Another type of man—the type that says, "Let Charlotte Eldridge do her worst, and be blowed!"—would have had no scruples on the subject. But Challis was a nervous person, and his Self was perplexing him—very especially now, with poor, dear, stupid Polly Anne making life a weariness, with her tempers and her fancies.

Was Judith Arkroyd aware, all the time, that this man's bark was in troubled waters, while she was floating in a secure haven—secure, at least, for now? Did she ask herself any questions?

Or was Challis just a shade priggish to show a stony front to such a very meek little reminiscence? His actual reply was: "I thought it was a good deal more, since my visit to Royd, I mean."

"I hope you'll pay us another visit." Judith thought to herself that two could play that game. And Challis immediately felt chilly, illogically; rather as though the soul-brush had slacked off. He would have to say something serious now, to merge this little fault in the stratification of their conversation.

"I hope to, certainly. Well!—what were we saying? . . . Oh yes!—you told me your age, you know. But even then I had misgivings about Aminta Torrington. I can't say I wasn't glad when old Magnus put his foot down. It's an odious part, and it wouldn't have suited you. Thyrza Schreckenbaum won't look so well on the stage, but it's more her part than yours."

"I should have thought Estrild was wicked enough for anything."

"So she is. But it's mediæval—good, honest, outrageous atrocity. It's almost Scriptural. Suppose, now, you had to apologize to the papa of your little tire-maiden for putting her on the stage, think how much easier it would be if she was only to play Messalina or Lucrezia Borgia than if it was Frou-frou, for instance!"

"That little sugar-plum—just fancy! No, I shouldn't like her to play Frou-frou at all. The atmosphere is purer in the other cases. How ridiculous one is! But point your moral, Mr. Dramatist."

"Let me see!—what are we talking about?" For Challis had forgotten. "I believe I'm on a line of self-justification. Didn't I tell you I never succeeded? I believe I'm creeping round to a sneaking apology for having offered you Aminta Torrington at all. I wouldn't have written the part for you—even then. But there it was, and you asked for the chance, and it was the only thing I had to offer."

Judith's laugh rang out. She had a capital stage laugh, musical but penetrating. "Nobody's finding fault with you, stupid man! But why 'even then'? It's not four months since. Where is the difference?" She had opened her eyes full on him to laugh at him, and now closed them again to wait for an answer. Had Challis been at his best, observing nature with a view to copy, he would have noticed that last time she laughed—about the sugar-plum's message—she had left her eyes open, full flash on him.

But he was too busy with a difficulty to do his duty by human nature, that it behoved him to know, like Peter Ronsard. That unfortunate "even then" that he had blundered out had brought him face to face with a fact that—so it struck him now—he had never felt properly ashamed of. How came it that, up to this moment, he had scarcely seen in it a matter to be ashamed of at all; and now, almost involuntarily, he had drawn a distinction between *now* and *then* that seemed to place Judith Arkroyd *then* on a lower level? It was actually true that three months ago he was trying for all he was worth to negotiate this girl into the good graces of his stage Jupiter; to get her on the boards to represent a woman whose wickedness he had specially invented, thereby to fall into the fashion of a time that he himself accounted an age of stark fools. For he had never come across an Aminta Torrington; but he conceived, for all that, when he put her on the stage, and set Mr. Guppy and Dick Swiveller off being up-to-date about her, that he was performing his part in the dance—the dance of fools! He felt he was in difficulties, and even for a moment contemplated an appeal to the Artist's Love for His Work, as an excuse for his own attempt to get the help of Judith's beauty for his *corps dramatique*. He hesitated, negatived it, and said to himself uncandidly that—thank God!—he had not fallen as low as that. But he never suspected, as this story has begun to do, that his sense of shame was due to the fact that this lady had become less cheap to him in these three months—dangerously less.

But he could not leave that "Why *even then?*" unanswered, with his questioner waiting there behind her closed eyelids for whatever excuse he might see his way to. *Why* even then? He felt he was flushing a little, and hoped she would not open her eyes. But his speech hung fire too long; and when they turned on him suddenly to see what it was going to be, he was caught, and could only see his way out through frankness. "I know," he said—"I know. Of course, I was wrong to suggest it. Still, it was the only thing that came to hand. It was either that or nothing. And you wished it . . . and besides . . ."

"I am not blaming you. Go on . . . 'and besides' . . ." The beautiful eyes that were to make so much mischief on the Danube were almost cruel in the way they waited for what Challis felt he had better not have begun to say.

But there was no help for it now. He had to continue, and did so: ". . . And besides, I did not know you so well as I do now . . . I mean, I saw the thing differently. . . ." He was getting deeper and deeper in the mire, and the eyes showed no signs of letting him off. "No; it's no use," he said abruptly. "I did wrong. But then, can you understand me?—how could I know it was *you?*" Then he made a weak attempt to *dispersonalize* his words. "No one of us remains the same." And then, feeling he wasn't shining, settled to hold his tongue. But he did not look Judith in the face over it.

She, for her part, being perfectly collected and thoroughly mistress of herself, only saw in his confusion a clear token that she was also mistress of the situation. She had done this sort of thing before—love of power being always her chief incentive—and had come out scathless. If a doubt now crossed her mind that she might be playing with edged tools, it was not strong enough to stop her.

"How true that is! Do you know, Challis"—please note this habit of address; it has somehow become natural to Judith—"I was thinking only just now, before you came in, how completely you have changed your identity since those days. Do you remember when we played chess? . . . Well, I'm almost ashamed to tell you how I thought of you then. . . ."

"You owe it me. See how I've been at the confessional myself!" Challis submits to the soul-brush without protest. It is no use. Why resist?

"You were merely an author whose works I hadn't read—yes!—that's true; authors never have any idea what a lot of people haven't read their books. I thought you would just come and go,

like the rest of them. But I fancied you seemed at a loose end, and I would take pity on you. I never thought . . ."

"Never thought what?"

"Don't look so *empressé* over it, Challis!" Really, this woman's faculty for going close to precipices, foot-sure, is something perfectly marvellous. Tenderness outright seemed the only natural sequel just now. But she will get back to safety, after gazing coolly over the edge. Trust her! "I couldn't say it all in one word, you see. . . . Never thought that in six months you would be writing a tragedy for me to play in. That's all that it comes to. At any rate, you seemed quite a different person then." Had she recoiled too abruptly from the precipice? Is there slight concession, just to accommodate a working equilibrium, in her last words? Her own working equilibrium, mind you;—in which to dangle her victim over that precipice at leisure, and yet to keep able to deny its proximity undisturbed, or pooh-pooh it altogether, at choice. For a thorough-paced female flirt enjoys driving her quarry mad best, when she knows she has plausible innocent unconsciousness enough left in the cellar to quench any fever of self-accusation of her own. "Who ever said a word, or thought a thought, about love-making? . . ." Don't we know the sort of thing?

Challis's own frame of mind—for the story must needs try to define it, however difficult it is to deal with—was one of a sort of thankfulness that he had perturbation of feeling all to himself. Therein lay his safety; he could keep it secret. He could and would pay for it by additional tenderness to poor dear Polly Anne —who *was* Polly Anne, after all, mind you!—when this last stupid bit of purposeless quarrelsomeness should have cleared away. But he wanted security that the conflagration whose smouldering he could not disguise from himself would be local. He had just, only just, stamped out a spark that might have become a flame at that precipice-edge, now a moment since. He was willing to go great lengths in persuading himself that there were no fires smouldering elsewhere; for to what end, in Heaven's name, should he recognize them?

But suppose he should be forced to! Suppose he should find one day that he could no longer parade before his mind this creed that was his security—this impossibility that he was ever present in his absence to this woman; as he had to confess perforce, struggle as he might against growing conviction, she was so often—nearly always—present to him. He built this faith upon a rock of friendship, genial and firm, but always cold, that an exaggerated respect

for her character—which really did him honour—chose to assign as the only leasehold her heart could accommodate him with. Perhaps unfounded hallucinations about the beauty of Judith's character were the most dangerous features of the disease Alfred Challis was sickening for, if it had not developed already.

All this may seem too many words about a simple thing. Perhaps Sibyl's way of disposing of the subject was more intelligible—saved trouble, certainly. "That man admires you too much, Judith, for it to be safe to play tricks with him. You'll do this sort of thing once too often. And then you'll be sorry." However, it was clear that there could be no real danger as long as the lady remained detached, and very little as long as the gentleman was convinced that she was so.

And he may have been so convinced—one would have said—when he found himself able to answer Judith with a philosophical, "Have you ever known a new acquaintance not to change completely in the first six months?" And she may have thought he was running too much to abstractions when she said, "I did not say you had changed completely"; as though she would not have him suppose her too unconcerned. He was not to slip from the web she was weaving round him by a device of gossipy discussion. Her remark just met the case; and the soul-brush, which had got a little out of gear, got to work again.

They went back to the tragedy, and talked of it so long that at length it came to measuring the minutes by his watch. Then Judith said to him, as though she had but just recollected it: "You found my letter, I suppose?" No, he had not—had she written? Oh yes!—it was posted last thing last night. There was nothing in it, or she would have spoken about it. The fact that she had written lubricated that soul-brush. But he must go, or he would be late. A few more words, mostly about how last night's entertainment had missed her presence, and the lady the Ross Tarbets had brought in her stead had proved a failure, and then Challis was standing beside her to say adieu—her hand in his. Really inevitable, if you think of it, on the supposition that the forms of civilization are to continue to hold good.

It was a perversity of Fate that chose this very moment for the only other frequenter of that room to open the door unheard. Judith could not see her sister through Challis as he stood there. He turned to go.

"Oh, Mr. Challis. I did not see it was you. Perhaps you are talking business. Don't let me disturb you."

"Not at all. I am just going."

"Stop one minute, Mr. Challis." Thus Judith. "Never mind Sibyl! You *must* try to persuade Mrs. Challis to come and see us. Now promise you will!" She had not referred to Marianne before, by the way.

"I'll try what I can do. But my wife goes her own way. Good-bye! Good-bye, Miss Sibyl!"

"How long had he been here?"

"Over an hour. I can't say exactly. You must ask Flphinstone when he came, if you want to know."

"It doesn't matter to me when he came."

"You asked." Sibyl made no reply. A lunch-gong sounded below, and she vanished, but presently returned.

"You are not coming down to lunch?" she said. "At least, are you? Or not?"

"Of course not! How could I, without flying in Sir Rhyscombe's face?"

But Sibyl's question had been mere conversation-making, or skirmish-seeking. She said what she meant directly after. "I suppose it's perfectly useless *my* saying anything. But you know what I think."

"I know what you think, dear! Go to lunch."

"Very well, Judith!" And Sibyl departed for lunch as Judith sounded her bell for her little handmaid, the reputed sugar-plum.

"How long will it take you to get to Wimbledon?" Challis asked the driver of the waiting cab.

"A tidy long time, the rate I'm going now!" was the reply. "Jump in!" Challis, feeling he was in the hands of a master-mind, obeyed without question, and the cab was off, at speed. Presently the master-mind said briefly, through his orifice above—as King Solomon may have spoken to the evil djinn he bottled—"Within the hour," and closed it on his fare for that period. The djinn was in for a lifer, and was immortal; so thought Challis to himself. That was too long, but short of that, something over an hour would not be unwelcome—just to think things over a little!

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW MARIANNE WENT TO TULSE HILL. OF BOB'S PHONOGRAPH, AND HOW HE POSTED A LETTER TO JUDITH. OF MARIANNE'S RETURN, AND MORE MISUNDERSTANDINGS. BUT IT WOULD BE ALL RIGHT IN THE MORNING

If King Solomon's captive had gone on scheming conciliatory attitudes through all eternity, he would probably have failed to hit upon the right one at the end of it, from mere want of presence of mind. Even the short "Within the hour" of Challis's cabman was a little too long for his fare to think things over in safety, without a risk of the things tripping one another up. He conceived a very good deportment to suit his return, based on sorrow for being so late, and then began to complicate it with considerations whether he should at once inquire more particulars about Marianne's alleged—and denied—indisposition of last night, or let it alone. Also, should he confess up at once where he had spent most of the morning, or let *that* alone! Perhaps that letter of Judith's that he would find on arriving would help matters. Yes, it would! He pictured himself to himself—as an actor in the concurrent drama of Life that he always made notes of by the way—saying, "Oh yes! That's nothing!—only about the play. I saw Miss Arkroyd for a few minutes this morning. You know, she was kept away last night by a sprained ankle, so I went to inquire. Hm-hm-hm!" He went the length of supplying the sound of reading a letter to himself, and threw the imaginary pieces he had torn it up into, to show how unimportant it was, into an image of a waste-paper basket. Then he turned round, that actor, and kissed his wife, who had recovered her temper. And then all went well in that play, and that actor told himself not to be a damned idiot about a fashionable beauty, who knew he was a married man with a family, and hadn't the slightest idea that—well?—that anything!

That was the play. The reality did not work out so comfortably. Challis was in time for lunch, as the cabman was as good as his word. "Fifty-six and a half," said he, looking at his watch; and added, in a comfortable sort of way, "Make it up eight shillings," as one who felt he really deserved the extra half-crown or so. He had a pleasant, engaging manner with the opposite sex, this cab-

man, saying to Harmood, when she brought him his money out: "Don't you get married without letting me know, my dear! My old woman, she might get sick of me any minute!" But Miss Harmood was accustomed to admiration.

Mrs. Challis had left word not to wait lunch, said the young lady, returning undisturbed. Also, there was a note to say with the letters—that is, to wit, with the postal accumulations. Challis, opening it, found a bald and severe statement that the writer was going to Tulse Hill, and might be late. Marianne's mother's domicile was always spoken of as Tulse Hill. Challis knew that this mother and daughter were seldom on cordial terms except when he was in disgrace with both, and it did not tend to allay the feeling of irritated mystification that came back now to Challis, with quickened memory of the events of the morning, that his wife should have pitched on this particular moment for a visit to Tulse Hill. She really seldom went to see her mother, for she was very lazy. But—and this was a big *but*—she *always* went to see her when there had been dissensions. So much so that when at any time Challis found that she had gone to Tulse Hill his tendency was to look back through the last twenty-four hours to discover what skirmish was responsible for the visit.

This time he was completely baffled. His wife knew perfectly well that she had been invited—cordially invited—to this last night's entertainment. Did all this mean that in the end he would have to give up associating with the outer world, and restrict himself to John Eldridge and Lewis Smithson? That seemed the only programme compatible with the enjoyment of a comfortable home. Only for God's sake let it be formulated! Let him know what he had to expect, and Challis would put his sign-manual to any reasonable treaty. . . . He stopped suddenly, yet asked himself—why stop? Then, knowing well that he dared not answer his own question, flinched off the subject.

This phase of reflection did not come immediately on opening Marianne's note. He had passed through a brief epoch of lunch for himself and dinner for Bob and Cat and Emmie since then. It had been a riotous but not unpleasant experience, and Challis was grateful for it. Bob's greeting to him had been, exactly transcribed: "Mater's gone to Tulse Hill. I say!—if you were to give me five shillings, I could buy a phonograph, because I've saved up fifteen. Tommy Eldridge has got one that does a menagerie, and you can hear a man having his head bit off." This felt jolly and cheerful, especially as the two little girls jumped with eagerness to hear the subsidy voted. Imitations of insub-

ordinate wild beasts, and the sounds incidental to detaching a Bengal tiger from his prey with red-hot irons, made lunch pass pleasantly, and Challis felt much happier. He granted the five shillings on condition that no operatic records should be purchased. He had heard "Voi che sapete" through a gramophone once, and he knew!

He was in his study, and Bob had probably nearly arrived at the phonograph local plague-centre in Putney, when he got to speculation, acknowledged as such, about a *modus vivendi* for himself and the mother of those two little wenches. He denied Judith any place in the problem, preferring to recognize, as the sole difficulty he had to fight against, the attitude of Marianne towards what he summed up as "Grosvenor Square" compendiously. He refused to admit that the class of feelings he entertained towards that lady —or might have entertained; he wouldn't quite admit them—could possibly come under discussion so long as he kept them to himself. Why, if every trifling vibration of personal feeling, every grain of salt on the dish of a man's friendship for a woman, was to be made the foundation of an indictment of faithlessness to his wife, where would matrimony be? But he nearly lost the thread of his reflections in the obligation to define what the feelings were that he was refusing to admit.

He would not allow for a moment that these feelings could possibly interfere with his affection for his wife. In fact, he actually shouted "Nonsense!" aloud in answer to some accusation to that effect for which he was not responsible. So loud, in fact, that Harmood came, and said, "Did you call, sir?" and disbelieved the "No, *I* didn't!" that she was met with. He would not have felt foolish on hearing his own voice getting out of bounds, but he did when it came home to him that Harmood must have heard him two rooms off at least. This would never do. He would get back to the Ostrogoths. How about Estrild's little handmaiden?—a good name for her?—something ending in *illa*? Favilla?—Scintilla?—Yes, that would do, without the *S*; otherwise, like Law Courts and tittles of evidence! Yes—certainly Cintilla! But he got no further.

Because the little sugar-plum brought back his interview of the morning. There was Judith again—he had nearly given up thinking of her as Miss Arkroyd—holding the mirror at arm's-length to make it include both faces easily, watching the *ensemble* with a slightly Ostrogothic effect, sympathetically resumed from some passage in the play she had half read, and knew the purport of; eyelids thrown up as per instructions of stage-trainer, to secure

the glare which seems to have come so freely on the faces of all our forbears whom the Stage has thought worthy of portrayal; just a hint of what upper lip and nostrils could do, if they tried, in the way of callousness towards tortured prisoners. For Judith had been thinking over the part. And how grand her eyes were, too!—something of the dark colour of sapphires by artificial light. And the little chick's face had come so well! That episode of the monkey-soap had produced a *nuance* of terror-stroke; exactly how Cintilla would have looked over a Christian martyrdom; a penalty deserved by a Dissenter, but alarming, for all that. He would tell Judith next time he wrote. . . . Well!—he *would* write, of course. But it was all in the way of business. What of that? . . . He would tell her he had christened the child Cintilla. She would call her Cintilla now; he was sure of it. . . . Now he must get to work! This would never do.

He actually did get to work this time. He wrote blank verse, or prose abstract to turn into blank verse, or other blank verse that was better than the first blank verse; or, if worse, could be rejected when found wanting. But the worst was when alternatives turned out equal—impossible to make choice of. After a while, he found himself with two such samples to choose between. Which speech of the two would come best from the lips of Estrild? He had to acknowledge that he was puzzled.

And yet a good deal might depend on it. He was wavering between two courses in the plot of the play. Each of these speeches seemed to point to one. Suppose he chose the one that, afterwards, Judith liked least, and followed on the line of plot that suited it! He would not feel happy over it, that way. Obviously, Judith was the proper person to decide. Master Bob might just as well carry the speeches to a handy typewriter at Putney, wait for them to be executed, and bring them back. Or stop! Challis knew he could rely on the accuracy of this typist, at a pinch. Why not write to Judith, leaving the envelope open, and let Master Bob put the typed copy in and post it? It would save a deal of time. Then he would be able to get on with the play first thing in the morning, if an answer came by the early post, as it might. He could mention Cintilla, too.

So said, so done! Master Bob was off like a shot, though reluctant to leave his phono, whose hideous din had been audible from afar since its arrival an hour ago. No sooner was he past recall than Challis remembered that if he had decided the question himself, it never would have been necessary to show the rejected version to Judith at all! But the fact is he had got rather into the

way of consulting her. Anyhow, it couldn't matter much, either way. He went back to his writing, and found something else to go on with. He went on with it peacefully until a cab arrived, and he looked out, expecting that it was Marianne. It was not, and he had an odd sensation of being glad he was sorry it was not. He saw who the visitor was, and retired.

Confound that woman! Why on earth need Charlotte Eldridge come bothering in when Marianne was away? A confirmatory announcement is followed by, "Oh, Mrs. Eldridge!—Did you *tell* her your mistress wasn't here?" Thus Challis to Harmood, who checks the incorrectness of his speech. "I said Mrs. Challis was not at home, sir. Mrs. Eldridge said she would come in and wait." On which Challis's comment—too much to himself to rank as an answer—is, "She'll have to wait."

"Am I to tell her so, sir?" Harmood, docile and well-bred, awaits instructions.

"*No!*—don't tell her anything. Perhaps your mistress will be in soon."

Challis made a show, for his own satisfaction, of going on with his work—but not for very long. As tea-time drew near, he looked at his watch, and decided not to have tea in the drawing-room with his visitor, but to go out. So, when he looked in on Charlotte for a moment, he was in walking trim, and merely shook hands hurriedly, and said: "Marianne must be in soon. She'll never stay to dine at Tulse Hill. *I* have to go. Ring the bell for tea, and make Harmood attend to you properly. Ta-ta!" and departed, affecting haste.

Mrs. Eldridge was not quite ready for tea, and also hoped Mrs. Challis would reappear shortly. So she postponed summoning the handmaiden, and took Challis's old novel, "The Spendthrift's Legacy," from the bookshelves, wishing to compare the portrait of his first wife, which she knew it contained, with current events. As she speculated over this and that, an unmistakable boy's head—that first wife's boy's—came in at the door, and said "Hullo!" in a very uncompromising way. It was merely greeting—no more!

"Well, Master Bob, where have you been? Come in and talk, and shut the door."

"Haven't got much time for talk. I say! I wonder if you can hear up here. We've got such a ripping phonograph."

"I can hear beautifully." Indeed, a woe-begone and God-forgotten croak has been audible for some minutes, rendering patter-songs. Bob warms to his subject: "Isn't it awfully jolly? You're really sure you can hear, though? I say, though, isn't it a pity?

I got 'Movement in A flat,' and I might have had 'The White-Eyed Musical Kaffir,' and it's such rot. Harmood says she's sure it's only music—like pianos."

"Why don't you open it and see?"

"Because then they won't change it. I might have changed it when I was out, if I'd known. But I thought it was a row in a house, and furniture getting broke, don't you know?" He gives further particulars of his misapprehension, but it will be as clear as it needs to be without them.

"Where did you go when you were out?" Mrs. Eldridge seems strangely unconcerned about the phonograph. But Bob is too high in the seventh heaven about it to conceive it possible that such indifference should exist. He takes his hearer's sympathy for granted, and as for suspecting any non-phonographic motives in his questioner—impossible!

"Putney. I could have gone to the shop twice over in the time I was waiting."

"What were you waiting for?"

"Tyepwriter. For the governor. Oh—quite half an hour!"

"What a shame! And you wasted all that time waiting. But you got what you went for? I mean your father got his typewriting?"

"No fear!" This with scorn. Then, to keep the heaven of veracity spotless: "*He* didn't get it, you know. I shoved it in her envelope, and shoved it in the pillar-box in High Street. Not the one near the tobacconist's."

"Whose envelope?"

"It was all right. There wasn't any other. Judith's. I say—are you quite sure you can hear up here? Hadn't I better bring it up, while you have tea?" For tea is coming of its own accord, audibly, outside the door.

"No—after tea. I shall listen better. Whose letter did you say you put in? Judith's—who's Judith?"

"Oh—*you* know! Me and Cat always call her Judith. Miss *Ark*royd." There is a trace of contempt, quite unexplained, in the accent on the first syllable. But Bob will be lenient, adding, "But she gave me my skates." Then, for he cannot honestly conceal a defect, "She's duchessy, for all that. A hundred-and-one, Grosvenor Square, W." And leaves her, classified.

Should Harmood make the tea? Not on Mrs. Eldridge's account, certainly! Mrs. Challis was sure to be back. Too probably, in practice, for either speaker to say "D.V." about it. But no atheism was meant—far from it! Harmood attended to the fire;

enough just to keep it in, although if it went on like this we should soon be able to do without. And the water couldn't go off the boil as long as there was ever so little methylated. Mrs. Eldridge was beginning to fear that there *was* ever so little, and that the boil's hour was come; and was questioning whether it would not be better on the whole to make tea in order that its getting cold should favour Marianne's return, when a cab-sound recommended itself to her notice for some unexplained reason, and she began making the tea. She really wished to see Mrs. Challis, having a card in her hand she wanted to play. One fights against a misdeal when one has seen the ace of trumps in one's hand. But let us be just to Mrs. Charlotte. Of course, it was well understood, between her and her conscience, that her motive was to make sure that no mischief came of that letter to Miss Arkroyd. Suppose that young monkey were to say he posted the letter, and say nothing about the palliative typewriting! And then suppose Alfred never thought it worth mentioning that he had written at all. Quite a case for a judicious friend, etc., etc. Oh, these meddlers!

The cab *was* Mrs. Challis—not literally; only household *patois*—and Mrs. Challis was sorry she was so late, Charlotte. Why had that lady not had tea? Marianne's manner was dry and hard. No—she was not the least tired, she said. She would go up and take her things off and come down immediately. She threw out a skirmisher to stop that horrible noise on her way up; and when she returned, if peace did not exactly reign where Bob was, somewhere below, at any rate the sounds that continued were human, not diabolical.

"Well?" Mrs. Eldridge spoke first.

"Wait till I've had some tea, and I'll tell you." A cup apiece elapsed, and then Marianne said briefly: "Says it's a parcel of lies. If poor Kate had been married, she *must* have known."

Charlotte considered. The detective character asserted itself. "How does she account for Mrs. Steptoe knowing the name of these Hallock people?"

"She doesn't account for it."

"What does she suppose her motive to be?"

"She doesn't suppose."

"Even if she knew the name, it's impossible to believe she would trump up such a story! With nothing to gain by it, Marianne dear, with nothing to gain by it!"

"I didn't say I did believe it. I only told you what mamma said."

A conversation that flags from lack of any visible step forward

welcomes another cup of tea, to pause on. After a measure of silence, so filled out, consciousness of the *impasse* brought in a new element, as stimulus.

"I talked to John about it."

"Why must you talk to John?"

"My dear Marianne! Well! John's a fool, I know, but I have a great respect for his judgment, sometimes. I shouldn't have begun about it myself. But he was there when Mrs. Steptoe was looking at the photographs, and he spoke of it to me. . . . What did he speak of? Oh—the whole thing!"

"What did he say?"

"It wasn't so much what he *said*. You know his way. He only said that a party he knew in the City knew a man in a Private Inquiry Office, and that sort of thing always ran into money. So his idea was—you know how funnily he phrases things?—his idea was that 'keep it snug' was the word. In fact, he repeated it several times. John's habit of repetition gets rather irritating, now and then."

"Did he say nothing else?"

"I don't think he did . . . oh yes!—he exonerated your husband. At least, he said that that sort of trap wasn't the sort of trap anyone would suspect Titus of being up to. It was a little obscure, but John is obscure."

Marianne showed no disposition to take an interest in John's opinions, even assuming them to be capable of recasting in an intelligible form. She sat holding her teacup, as one anxious not to break with a pleasant memory. But her face was not pleasant for all that. It might be unfair to say it had a set jaw and a scowl, because that suggests a prizefighter without a prize. But accept as much of the description as leaves an image of a comely woman with dark hair—plenty of it—in a plait, and rather *embonpoint* for thirty. Put in the mole we have spoken of, just on the cheekbone; but don't run away with the idea that there must be a stye in the eye on the other side, that you are not looking at. Let Marianne have all that is left of a bonny robust girlhood that was in its day rather more acceptable—consciously so—to her brother-in-law than the more delicate approach to beauty of his deceased wife. But Marianne had gone off, too; there was no doubt of it. Nevertheless—and in spite of occasional acerbity and frequent sullenness—her husband loyally cherished the idea that she was good with a deep-buried goodness, a quality that might be relied on when the hour of trial came, a rockbed of sound-heartedness, to build on even when appearances suggested earthquake.

Some such appearance may have made Mrs. Eldridge cautious about pursuing the thread of John's judgments, as she joined in her friend's silence beyond her usual habit—a loquacious one. Presently she said, to relieve the monotony, "Shall I put your cup down?" and took it with a well-formed hand she was vain of—indeed, it ran close to beauty—from one that was rather a defect in its owner; too chubby, too accented at the rings, to be redeemed by a mere addendum of filbert-nailed fingers.

Marianne then said, as she surrendered the cup: "You saw him before he went out?" She spoke as though she took her companion's knowledge of the contents of her own silence for granted.

Mrs. Eldridge seemed to acquiesce. "He looked in for a moment," she said.

"I suppose he got his letter." This was mainly thinking aloud, for how could Charlotte know anything about his letter? She could guess, though, and was not slow over it.

"I suppose so, because he answered it." Then she may have felt that her knowing so much without data might seem unwarranted; for she added: "At least, if it was a letter from her," and then explanatorily, in response to an inquiring look, "Yes!—Judith Arkroyd, of course." She probably had no definitely mischievous motive in the phrasing of this. The assumption that any "her" must be Miss Arkroyd only showed what she herself had been thinking of. But it teemed with suggestion of continuous correspondence between the lady and gentleman in hand. Marianne flushed angrily, far more moved by the way in which she heard of it than by the mere letter itself. It was only one of many letters, after all!

"How do you know? How can you tell?"

"Marianne dear—really!"

"Really what? No, Charlotte, you're nonsensical. Of course it was her! Why *do* you take a pleasure in mystifying me? Can't you tell me what you mean? How do you know he answered it?"

"Dear, if you'll be patient, I'll tell you. But, really, you do make so much out of nothing . . . it's all about *nothing*." And, indeed, Mrs. Eldridge looked frightened, as a mischief-maker may whose hobby has got the bit in its teeth.

"If it's nothing, at least you can tell me what it is." And Marianne, who a moment since was red, now goes white, with hands just restless and a foot that taps uneasily. There had been nothing in antecedent circumstance to warrant so much excitement. So thinks Mrs. Charlotte, and would like to hark back, and

make her mischief gradually, on congenial safe lines. A row would be premature, to her thinking.

"What *what* is, Marianne dear?" she says. But then makes concession: "Only, of course, dear, I know what you *mean*. How did *I* come to know about the letter he sent her? It's quite simple. . . ."

"Well—go on!"

". . . It was Bob. He was in here just now, and told me his father had sent him to post a letter to Judith—that's what the young monkey calls her—and then you asked if he had got his letter. Of course, I thought it *must* be from her."

"Why?"

"Oh, nonsense *why*, Marianne dear! How *could* it be anyone else?" And Mrs. Challis cannot answer this, naturally, as she knows quite well it was Judith's handwriting alone that attracted her attention to the letter, and that there were at least a dozen other items by the same post. Charlotte continued: "I can see nothing to make such a fuss about. With this play-acting going on, a letter might be anything."

"How do you know I thought it wasn't anything?"

"I dare say you didn't, dear. Of course, one takes for granted that one's husband . . . well!—even if it was John, it would never occur to me. And look at the difference between my John and your Titus!"

As it is impossible to fathom Mrs. Eldridge's motive for ascribing the character of Lovelace to the chosen of her affections, the attempt shall not be made. Some things begin, exist, and cease, and none knows why. But one may conjecture. Was it that Charlotte wanted a certificate to her understanding—from experience—of Man the Baboon that she sometimes sketched St. Martin's-le-Grand and the Royal Exchange as a sort of ilex-groves furnished with Mænads and Bassarids, all for the delectation of respectable Satyrs with stove-pipe hats or billy-cocks, each in his degree? Like Nicholas Poussin, you know! Yes—that was it! John's character had to be sacrificed, to show through what slant or squint in a side-aisle his wife had got a glance at the mystic altar of the Bona Dea.

But Marianne was not prepared to accept the view suggested. "One man's the same as another," said she. Then, with an access of feeling that she was being entangled in something, she knew not what, that she was not clever enough to escape from, "I wish you wouldn't talk like this, Charlotte. I hate it!"

"Talk like what, dear?" says Charlotte, but adds illogically,

"It wasn't me began talking like this. It was you said, how did I know he answered it? I could only tell you."

"I don't care what who said, or anyone. It's nothing to do with it. You know what you're trying to make out, so where is the use of pretending?" Mrs. Eldridge interjects, "What am I trying to make out?" But this is ignored, and Marianne continues, "And you know you're wrong and the thing's ridiculous." Through all this runs a tacit acceptance of the existence of "the thing." But it remains undefined, by mutual consent.

At this point Mrs. Eldridge began to suspect that Marianne was showing more tension of feeling than the case, as known to her, seemed to call for. She must find out, in the interests of the drama she wanted to enjoy—for, of course, true mischief-maker that she was, she never admitted that mischief was her motive—what had passed at Tulse Hill to account for her friend's *accès* of asperity. Because of course it was that! It was that horrid old woman.

"I suppose you talked it all over with your dear mother, Marianne?"

"There wasn't anything to talk over with my dear mother that I know of. Yes, I did—I talked over what you mean."

"And she agreed with me, I'm sure?"

"I don't know whether she did or didn't, and I don't know what 'agree' means. But I do know that I won't talk to mamma again, neither about this or anything else, unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"If she talks as she does. She knows, because I told her."

"Don't tell me about it, dear, if you don't like." With which licence to silence Mrs. Eldridge settles down to the hearing of a good long tale, which she knows will have to be elicited by jerks, as Marianne is profoundly Anglo-Saxon—not a drop of Celtic blood in her veins. It comes, and, summed up, amounts to this:

Marianne had carefully avoided saying a single word at Tulse Hill about "it"—in fact, had wanted to keep Grosvenor Square out of the conversation altogether. She had really only spoken about Mrs. Steptoe's story and the photographs, and how "it" came in Heaven only knew. But there "it" was, and mamma had been very disagreeable about it, and said things. What things? Oh, of course the sort of things she always said . . . well!—about her own marriage with Titus, and the Deceased Wife's Sister business. Just as if she, Marianne to wit, wasn't only poor Kate's half-sister—and it just made all the difference! But what did she say? Well, it seemed that she had up and denounced, in the most positive way, about how she had always said, and always should

say: that the Blessing of God could never rest on an Unscriptural Union. And then, being pressed to develope this thesis, had fallen back feebly on the position that "we were told" it was Sinful, and that Marianne knew where just as well as she did; which was indeed true in a sense, for neither of them knew anything of theology, or divinity, or exegesis, except that the Bible was the Word of God, and contained everything necessary to Salvation, as well as to the fostering of all our little particular prejudices. In fact, it would have been difficult to light upon any two completer agnostics, etymologically, than this mother and daughter. So, though the former was happily unconscious of the whereabouts of any texts bearing on the question, she was convinced of their existence; only making this much concession to her daughter's position—that the marriage of a man with a half-sister-in-law was only half as bad as with the complete article. It was a Venial Sin, and a commodious one thus far, that it still permitted intercourse under protest between a daughter who had committed it and a mother who went to church.

On this occasion, when the admixture of foreign matter into the discussion had raised the question of possible nuptial infidelities, the old lady had embittered her criticism of her daughter's position by pointing out that Titus might do whatever he liked, and she would never be able to get a divorce, like a legally married woman. The knot that had never been tied could never be untied, clearly; and one of the great advantages of conformity to established usage was hopelessly lost. This view had fairly enraged Marianne, who had fought for her right to a divorce as the tigress fights for her young. Not to be a wife at all according to the law of the land was bad enough, but if you had to forego your birthright to be a legal *divorcée* or *divorceuse,* whatever were we coming to?

"I must ask John how that is," said John's wife, really to make talk, for she was at the moment weighing the question whether this item in Marianne's recent collision with her dear mother was enough to account for her ill-temper. "You would never suppose John knew anything at all, by his manner; but it's wonderful what he does know. There he is!" There he was, and there also was Mr. Challis, who had met him on his way from the station, and told him he believed Charlotte was at the Hermitage, and he had better come in. And there also was a Mrs. Parminter, or Westrop —Marianne wasn't sure which—who had really wanted to leave a card and cease, only Titus had gone and asked her in, and now Marianne supposed we should have to be civil.

Do not suppose this Mrs. Parminter or Westrop has nothing to do with the story. She will go out of it, certainly, very soon; because she has promised to be at the Spurrells' at six, and it takes a full quarter of an hour. But she has an influence on it, by the spell of her presence acting on the social *rapports* of the household. Briefly, we all know it's quite different when there are people; and this Mrs. Parminter or Westrop was quite as much people, *ad hoc,* as if she had been the Spurrells.

When there are people, you assume a genial smile, and affect a crisp alacrity of interest you do not feel in their loves or their sheep, or even their digestions. You shout; so do they. Then someone else shouts louder, and you try to finish what you were shouting. But you don't succeed, and perhaps you give in; and then your family—lady-wife, mother, sister, what not!—says afterwards, need you have been so glum, and couldn't you have exerted yourself to make things *go* a little? And you're sorry, because it's too late now, and the Mrs. Parminter or Westrop of your case, or your particular Spurrells, have trooped away with parting benedictions, and left the hush of daily life behind. And then your family lady looks at the cards the Mrs. Parminter or Westrop has deposited, and sees which of the two she is, and says she thought so.

All this happened in the present case, the Mrs. Parminter or Westrop having swept Mr. and Mrs. Eldridge away in her vortex, because they were going in the same direction; and having said to them what a delightful call she had had, and what delightful people the Challises were! To which Mr. Eldridge had appended a note to the effect that he had known Challis quite a long time, now you came to think of it. And the equivocal lady had said dear her!—how very interesting!

The genial wooden smile, as of the visited, on the faces of Marianne and her husband died abruptly as its cause became a distant shout. It gave place to a mere puzzled look on his, provoked, no doubt, by the expression of cold fatigue on hers and her silence. So far as he could recollect there was nothing to account for this—at least, at the date of their last parting. The interview about the gas-man was unleavened with tenderness, certainly, but then it was the merest household colloquy. But, to be sure, there had been Tulse Hill since then! That was it!—it was that horrid old woman! So it was just as well to say nothing. Challis said it, and went to get ready for dinner.

"Getting ready" amounted to little more than washing his face and hands. It could not interfere with mental schemes for approaching and conciliating his wife. He really wanted to do so,

for he knew in his inmost heart that he had more than once this day turned angrily against suppositions that *would* present themselves—hypothetical readjustments of his life, always with Judith Arkroyd sooner or later working into them through a mist of the honour in which he held Marianne. Suppose—oh, suppose!—all his life had been different! Suppose he had known her in her girlhood, this Judith! He had let the image he had formed of the self he would have been, had all been otherwise—just for one moment he had let it hunger for the hand, the lips, the eyes of this hypothetical girlhood. It seemed so slight a wrong to grant himself that luxury, when by hypothesis he was then never to have seen or spoken to either of his wives of the time to come. But the moment he had recognized the nature of this supposition he had flung it from him, as he had others of a like sort. Just so the watcher, sworn not to sleep, believes himself awake even as the spell seizes him; then strikes hard to slay the coming dream, and is awake again. Alfred Challis had been secretly guilty of this particular dream, was angry with himself for it, and was scheming now to lay some stress on his affection for his living wife. He knew enough from long experience of Tulse Hill to ascribe to it powers of producing an even greater severity of deportment than Marianne's at this moment.

He judged it best "not to be too previous," and went from his own dressing-room straight to the drawing-room. That would make the best job. He felt obliged to John Eldridge for this expression of his.

Marianne followed in due course, and appeared in conflict with a preoccupying wrist-button. His proposed arrangement was to say, "Well, Polly Anne, now let's hear all about it!" And she spoiled it with, "Stop one moment. I must get Harmood to do this for me."

A new departure became necessary. But it would not be half so *dégagé*. A certain amount of spontaneity would have to be surrendered. Try again!

"Got it right now?" Yes—that was best!—not to go outside current event.

"What—the button? Oh yes, it's right enough! At least, it'll do." And then dinner, according to Harmood, was on the table, and the button lapsed.

"Did you find your mother well?" This followed on the heels of soup, concluded. By this time Challis had given up all his little conciliations, and was drifting, a mere log on the current of matrimony. Oh yes!—Marianne had found mamma well—that is,

just as usual. She wasn't going to help, evidently. However, he would try yet again, but presently. Presently did not come, apparently, till cigar-time. Then he made a more vigorous attempt. "Well, Polly Anne, I think you might ask me where *I've* been."

"Where *have* you been?" The amount of concession there was in this was just sufficient to make it impossible to indict the conversation as unendurable, and demand improvement or silence; but not enough to pave the way to cordiality.

Challis would probably not have ventured on his last attempt if he had had nothing to report but his visit to Grosvenor Square. But this afternoon excursion, later, had given him confidence. He was able to answer that he had looked in to tea at the Ponsonby-Smiths', or whatever the name was; and what did Polly Anne think? Celia Ponsonby-Smith had got twins.

"Celia Robinson, I suppose you mean," said Marianne coldly. "I saw it in the *Telegraph*. Did you go nowhere else?"

"In the morning—yes! I went for a book to the London Library, and made a call. Nowhere else this afternoon."

"I meant in the morning. Don't spill your coffee. The cup's too full."

"No—it's all right. There!" Challis reduced his coffee to safety-point, and was not ungrateful for the slight break in the conversation. He was able to affect a balked readiness to speak, as one whose swallowed coffee has left him free to say the words it interrupted.

"I called in at Grosvenor Square."

"I see." This is a simple speech enough, but if the *I* lasts a long time and the *S* even longer, it expresses diabolical insight. Yet one can say nothing. Challis could only ignore it, and continue:

"I told you Judith Arkroyd had had an accident. Or didn't I?" But he knew quite well; and Marianne knew he knew, and merely shook her head. He went on: "Well—she has. And she wasn't able to come to the Acropolis last night."

"A bad accident?" Marianne seems determined to keep her words at the fewest.

"Nothing very serious! A sprained ankle. She'll have to lay up for it. Not a hanging matter!"

"Of course you didn't see her?"

"I did. There is nothing to prevent her receiving visitors."

"Was she up?"

"My dear Marianne! Of course she was up. What do you suppose?"

"I don't know. I don't pretend to understand these sort of people. I suppose it's all right, either way." And this lady then withdrew from the conversation, leaving her husband half-nettled and half-apologetic, but quite unable to lay hold of any excuse for expressing either irritation or apology. Especially the latter, because why should he think confessions or apologies necessary?

Perhaps nothing could throw more light on the way the heads of this household quarrelled—for domestic bliss has many forms—than the internal comment made by its eldest son when he returned by contract at half-past ten from supping with his friend Tommy Eldridge. What Master Bob said to himself, after a short wait for sounds of human voices, was: "*Row* on, I expect. Pater and mater not talking!" He put his head in at the drawing-room door and made a statement. "I say. I'm not late." His father, who understood Master Bob down to the ground, attached the right meaning to "What are you?" which followed. He looked at his watch. "Ten-thirty-three," said he. "Three minutes late! Now go to bed, and leave the phonograph alone till to-morrow."

"What!—not only just one, in the breakfast-room, with the door shut?" But even so conditioned, it is too late for phonographs, and Bob goes to his couch a sadder boy but as great a goose as ever. Before doing so, he has to give securities that he will not pound about overhead and wake his sisters; and to note that his pater is reading and sorting letters, and his mater has settled down to a book.

You know what that means, especially when the book is bicolumnar, microtypical, and there's such a lot to read before it gets to where everyone says it's so improper. You read the first brisk spirt, till you get to the point at which the author's inventive power has flagged, and then you become strangely content to repose underneath that work, with your eyes closed and your hands peacefully folded over your foreground. But Bob was wrong. His mater had not settled down to her book in the true sense of the words, and Challis knew it by the speed at which the leaves turned. Marianne couldn't read at that rate, even without stopping to think of the meaning. And you must, sometimes.

Besides, Challis had glanced at that book himself, and knew his wife would never understand local Americanisms and Indian dialects in Kamschatka. It was an interesting book, though, and Challis remembered how the first chapter began: "Midnight in Nootka Sound, and the blood still dripped monotonously from the shelf above, etc." He was just thinking could he safely venture on asking the reader why this first chapter was called "Hello!" when

she put the book aside, and said briefly: "I'm going to bed." She had not spoken a word since Bob's incursion.

Special effort is needed to keep in mind how little Marianne's husband knew of the causes of her perturbation. So far as he could see, the whole ground was covered by illogical resentment against a group of his friends, whose advances to herself—as it seemed to him—she had inexcusably rejected. Still, he could frame excuses for her; it was not for her as it was for him; he had the key of the position. It was a case for compromise, and Marianne was uncompromising. That was all! As for any conception that a new light thrown on his past had presented him to her as distrustful and secretive—certainly keeping back something she must have a right to know; possibly, though she hesitated over this, something disgraceful to himself—no such idea crossed his mind for a moment.

It would be all right in the morning! He had said that many a time overnight, in tiff-times, and peace had followed as predicted. Tulse Hill, considered as an incident, was too recent for any sort of conciliatory effort to be worth making—to-night, at any rate. Let it alone, and have a finishing smoke! Go back to the Ostrogoths!

Then, as he wondered whether, for all its slow combustion, the grate would not consume its coal before he got through his cigar, there came back to him an image of Judith Arkroyd in a dangerous form—an image in which physical beauty was subordinate to a subtle relationship of soul, which he had imperceptibly slipped into ascribing to his own and hers. A dangerous form, because Love played a new part in it for this man. His first wife had probably been—put it plainly—a mistake; his second . . . well!—he was very fond of Marianne—very—and they had had many happy times together. But it wasn't quite the same thing as—oh, dear!—well, it couldn't be, you know! One can't have everything.

Much more dangerous, that sort of thing, to our thinking, than the primitive fascinations of Aphrodite herself! Indeed, we have sometimes thought that lady didn't go the right way to work in that affair with Adonis. She should have *sympathized* with him. All the same, mind you!—so Cynicism murmurs at our elbow—man has an extraordinary faculty for detecting companion-souls to his own, pulses preordained to beat in unison with his, in bodies of extraordinary beauty, of indisputable grace. *He* may squint, and his eyesight be defective, but his predestined She, the mate of his soul, will gaze on him through lustrous orbs of tender radiance. Her voice will reach him through the rosiest of lips, the pearliest of teeth, without so much as one gold stopping; and all the while there

will he be, without a sound tooth in his head to boast of, unless he has the effrontery to make a parade of his crown-and-bridge treatment. He may even wear a wig, and brazen it out, in the same breath with a protest against a single false tress on the head of his other dearer life-in-life—this comes out of Poetry, somewhere—while as for a Venus Calva . . . simply out of the question, thank you!

Anyhow, the predestined mate of the soul was a much more kittle head of cattle to shoe behind when chosen for her beauty from among the daughters of an aristocracy not celebrated for ugliness, and manipulated by photographers into bestowing their eyes upon the readers of the shiniest print that ever lay on the table of an hotel reading-room.

CHAPTER XXV

OF AN UNCALLED FAMILY ROW, AND HOW BOB'S BREAKFAST WAS POSTPONED. OF A LETTER FROM JUDITH THAT MADE MATTERS WORSE

THE Mistake's son was the unfortunate means of causing the next day to begin badly. For he rose early, and hastened to the plague-centre at Putney whence Records flowed, to acquire in exchange for the condemned piece of mere music either "The White-Eyed Musical Kaffir" or something equally juicy. Naturally, he found the shop not open, at an hour when sparse milk and eggs were the only things procurable. "Won't open till ten," was the current opinion. Bob, disgusted, called on his friend Tommy Eldridge, and found sympathy and consolation. Tommy had had the "Musical Kaffir" for two days past, and the Kaffir had palled. He would swop him for the "mere music" record and twopence. Bob closed with the offer, but the bargain had taken time; and, as a consequence, he burst in upon breakfast at half-past eight o'clock, and announced his acquisition with an evident conviction that his hearers had been awaiting his return with suspended breaths. His step-mother—or aunt; either will do—confiscated his treasure promptly, and denounced Science within the home-circle. Lectures, she said truly, were one thing; houses another. Bob cited the indulgences shown to other fellows by their parents in respect of phonographs, and Cat said that Tommy Eldridge always had his till tea-time. Her mother told her not to speak with her mouth full, and met Master Bob's half-inaudible "I shall ask the Governor, anyhow!" with so harsh an enquiry, "What's that you're saying, sir? Don't mumble to yourself!" that Bob evacuated his position, and awaited reinforcements.

Marianne was making the common mistake of easing ill-temper by attacking objects blameless of provoking it—blowing off steam through wrong channels. At another time she would have been too lazy to open a campaign against a phonograph. Now she found it a relief to pitch in—Bob's phrase—and enlarged her scheme of operations. "If it wasn't for your father," she said, "you would all be breakfasting upstairs." Bob, who was afraid of her because she had boxed his ears for him before now—and not so very long ago—only muttered a *sotto-voce* "I'm a Rugby boy now, and that

would be grandmother," expressing in his simple, limited way his sense of acquired status, and the folly of ignoring it. Marianne, who was not really the least angry with Bob, and certainly didn't care twopence about the "Musical Kaffir," saw in this suppressed defiance an outlet for her own high-pressure atmosphere, and jumped at its inaudibility as though it were the head and front of its offending. What was it he was mumbling?—she said again, with growing anger. He wouldn't mumble if his father was here. Bob denied this audibly, probably meaning that he had said nothing he would have scrupled to say to his father. He felt indignant and injured; having, indeed, meant no wrong, though his preoccupation about the glorious phonograph had no doubt made his speech appear careless.

As ill-luck would have it, Challis, coming down at this moment to breakfast, and not in a beaming good-humour himself, heard his wife's indictment, and quickened his descent of the stairs. He resolved at once on his usual policy whenever Marianne came to open warfare with any of the family—namely, to take her part at the moment, for discipline's sake, even supposing he had to make amends for it after by concessions.

"What is the matter?" said he magisterially, in the pause of silence his entry created. It was more impressive than any amount of excitement, and the younger little girl, Emmie, began to cry in a terrified way. Nothing creates the formidable like fear, even when it is only a small child's. The tension became full-blown, having—please observe!—all grown out of nothing.

"You must ask your boy what he means, Alfred, and find for yourself. All I can say is, that if I am to be spoken to so before the servants, I cannot go on."

"How dare you speak to your mother so—eh? What do you mean by it?" Challis's assumption of uncontrollable anger is affectation, merely from motives of policy. He knows he can make it up with Bob, any time.

"*I didn't.*" Bob no more knows what he is denying than his father knows what he has accused him of. Never mind! Families don't quarrel by the book. Bob is scarlet, for all that, and warms to his subject. "*She* took my Record, and it cost a shilling, and twopence over. *She* wanted to prevent me . . ." But it remains untold, whatever it was, for Marianne interrupts:

"You can hear for yourself how he calls me *she*. But do as you like, Alfred!"—use of this name means a state of siege, observe!—"He is your boy." After which disclaimer of a parentage no one had accused her of, she repeats, "*She, indeed!*" to rub it in.

Challis at once perceived that he must either sacrifice poor Bob on the altar of Peace, or be entangled in a hopeless discussion of rights and wrongs with Marianne; *how* hopeless, only experience such as his could know! Action was necessary, and he pounced on Bob, seizing him by the collar of his coat. "How *dare* you speak so to your mother? How *dare* you . . ." But stop! He could never ask him how he dared say *she* to his mother! Even Marianne would suspect him of making game of her. So he had to pretend that his indignation had overwhelmed him. "Don't answer me, sir," he shouted, shaking the culprit with a severity probably more apparent than real. "Be off to your room directly, and stop there!" And the child that was crying broke into a roar, to do honour to the way the scene had climaxed. Bob vanished.

The roaring slowed down, and was gradually merged in bread-and-marmalade. An intermediate period of sobs and bites, overlapping, was filled out with public discomfort—an embarrassed silence in which Challis's visible vexation was unfairly taken advantage of by Marianne, to say, "You can't wonder at the child, when you're so violent." Challis closed his lips lest he should speak; but it came home to him, in some mysterious way, that he was in the wrong. Men are; or if they are not, it comes to the same thing. For a firm conviction in the mind of a woman with a strong will and a proper spirit has all the force of fact. But Challis's acquiescence in his guilt was accompanied by a growing resolution to take Bob to the play, *coûte que coûte,* before he went back to school on Monday. He had no misgivings about the boy's breakfast. He knew Harmood might be relied on, as Bob was a favourite in that quarter. Probably a compensation-breakfast was in store for Bob, later.

It was a bad moment for dealing with a female correspondent who is "always sincerely yours." Had Challis been confident that an unopened letter on the table was from one who was only "his faithfully"—though, indeed, Rebekah could not have been much more to Isaac—or even "his truly," he might have opened it confidently and made some excuse to throw it carelessly along the table to his wife while he went on to his last consignment of press-clippings. Or he might have done so equally, however "sincerely his" Judith Arkroyd's signature said she was, if only this stupid needless row had not been bred by Mrs. Challis's Short Temper out of Bob's Phonograph. But then, in addition to the sincerity with which Judith surrendered herself for ever, Challis knew the letter would contain a repeat of her invitation of the day before to his

wife—probably to accompany him to Royd at Whitsuntide. So he postponed opening all his letters, and made the fatal mistake of hustling them together as though he valued them all alike. Marianne knew better. Had she not seen him pause half a second over that characteristic, unmistakable hand—a strong bold upright script that seemed to speak its contempt in every line for the scratchy Italicisms of its writer's ancestors? How was she to interpret its being packed away out of her sight in this way? However, she wished the jury in the court of her inner conscience to understand distinctly that she did not care one straw what Titus did or did not do in respect of Grosvenor Square—but within well-defined lines. For, apart from the degree to which she relied on the social safeguards of that Square's aristocratic pride, she had about her husband the feeling many students of nature ascribe to married folk who are not ripening for divorce—the feeling Geraint had about Enid, according to Tennyson. Marianne, for all her tempersomeness and jealousy, loved and reverenced Challis too much to dream he could be guilty of anything that would supply copy for a modern novel.

A more frank nature than Marianne's would have said to him when he pocketed his unopened letters, "What!—not read her letter? Well!—*I* wouldn't write again, if I were she!" or some such pleasantry. Her obdurate silence provoked him to say what might else have stopped on his tongue's tip. It came just after the children had vanished to the nursery. "I think, Marianne, considering that the boy is going back to school on Monday, you might have . . . Well!—you might have been a little easier with him."

"I'm sorry he is going back to school; that is where he learns it all. But I expected to be found fault with."

"Learns all what? What does he learn?" But the lady simply bristles with silence in reply to this question, so intensely does it call for no answer. Titus continues, letting it lapse: "I don't think you remember that it was I that gave him the phonograph; at least, I gave him leave to buy it."

"I don't remember anything about it, and I'm not going to try to. Of course you gave it him, to encourage him against me. Very well, Alfred, you take his part! Oh, *I* know!—oh yes, I'm not his mother. But I know what poor Kate would have said, if she had been here now." This was rather a favourite position of Marianne's; only she never by any chance filled out her claim to knowledge of what would have happened under perfectly inconceivable circumstances. She kept details secret.

He thought of replying: "Poor Kate wouldn't be a fool, anyhow!" For he was vexed about Bob. But he was ashamed to find how Time had changed the face of things, that he should actually take exception to his own statement on its merits! Wouldn't she? He wasn't at all sure. He gave it up, and merely said: "We won't talk any more about it now. Where's Bob's Record?"

This was unfortunate. He had better have swept his letters into his pocket, with the hand that was waiting to do it, and carried them off to his study. Instead, he waited for the confiscated Musical Kaffir.

"No—Alfred—it's no use! I won't give it you if Bob's to have it. Horrible noise! Besides, look at the way he's been behaving!"

Challis gets visibly angry, or angrier. "You had much better give it me, Marianne," he says, reaching out his hand for it. But he just misses it, and it goes into Marianne's pocket; past recovery, without concession on her part or physical force on his. All might have been well if the dispute had not got to this point.

Things being thus, nothing remains for the story but to tell what actually took place. The lady persisted. No, she would *not* give it up! Nothing would induce her. Appeals on moderate lines, to come, to be reasonable, and so on, only made matters worse—tending, in fact, towards admission of weakness on Challis's part. He became more irritated, and in his annoyance at having to give up the point made an unfortunate speech. "Well—keep it, then, if you're so obstinate. I won't try to take it from you. But I tell you this, Marianne: there are many husbands that would." His only meaning was to lay a little stress on his own forbearance. He would not even try. But his speech sounded like an assertion of male power against female weakness, as well as of legal right.

The last was what stung Marianne. Her recent encounter with her mother had thrown doubts on her right to a divorce. How could they be reconciled with a husband's legal right to confiscate a White-Eyed Musical Kaffir, or any record, for that matter? Her eyes flashed, and she bit her lip as she turned to leave the room. A laugh that was no laugh came of it, but scarcely speech, to speak of. All she said was, "Because they could"—not very intelligibly. And then the nurse, Martha, with some appeal through the just opened door, cut off the interview, and imposed an every-day demeanour on both.

Challis went to his room to cool down. To him his wife's last words were inexplicable, unless they meant that his physique was

not his strong point, and that he might not have recaptured the Musical Kaffir so very easily. But that did not seem to ring quite true, neither. Never mind!—he had to look at his letters. After all, it was not the first time Marianne had been unintelligible.

But her exclamation had no relation whatever to what Bob chose to call "vim." It was part of the new phase of thought connecting her mother's views about the legitimacy of her own marriage-knot with Challis's suggestion of a male domination that others —not he—might have legitimately claimed. If she was not to be Titus's lawful wife—if she was to be swindled by a trick of jurisdiction—at least let her have the advantages of her freedom. Let there be no rubbish about a man's right to rule, about a wife's duty to obey. Keep that sort of thing for authenticated marriage-lines, if hers were to be flawed.

It was the vaguest hint of an idea—no more! A gleam not worth a thought, except for what it grew to.

A human creature with an unopened letter in its hand is raw material for an Essay on the Past, Present, and Future. Rather dangerous things for a thoughtful scribbler to touch on rashly! Better say as little about them as possible.

That, or something like it, was Challis's thought as he stood in his writing sanctum, reasonlessly hanging fire over the opening of Judith Arkroyd's letter. Or was it that he wanted time to settle down after the recent *émeute?* Some nervous characters—like his —shrink from a clash of conditions, a discordance of consecutive surroundings, and are prone to let each association die down before another takes its place. Challis wanted to shake clear of his domesticities, maybe, before transferring his thoughts to Judith and the invitation to Royd that he knew her letter would repeat.

For whatever reason, he hung fire. And when in the end he opened the letter, he did it slowly. He took a broad view of it; then placed it on the table while he lighted a pipe, with a misgiving that there was a flaw in it that would prevent his showing it to Marianne. When he picked it up for deliberate revision, smoke-encircled, he found it read thus:

"Dear Mr. Challis,

"Speech A. will suit me best—but never mind that if you feel like deciding on the other. Both enclosed back.

"Remember about Whitsuntide. Only please do succeed in persuading Mrs. Challis to come this time. Shall I come and go down on my knees to her? It does seem such a shame that she

should keep so much in the background. Tell her she *must* come. I leave it to you—but do try!

"Sincerely yours,

"J. A."

What the dickens possessed Judith—not Miss Arkroyd, please!—to use that unfortunate expression, "keep so much in the background"? Of course, Grosvenor Square is the foreground of the Universe—a little of Challis's style as an author outcropped here—but why not take it for granted? Why, in a communication that was to be shown to a fretful porcupine, need Grosvenor Square let the cat of its deep-rooted faith in its position out of the bag of its good-breeding? That was Challis's metaphorical standpoint. But really Judith very seldom sinned in this way; scarcely ever, so Challis persuaded himself, trespassed on Mr. Elphinstone's department.

Now, why need Mrs. Challis choose this exact moment to remind her husband that his Fire Insurance expired on the twenty-fifth, within fifteen days of which, et cetera? Why had he left his door on the jar, so that she should look in, unannounced, just as he was deciding that it would never do to show her this letter from Judith? He had no time to reflect—barely enough to replace it in its envelope. And that, after all, was the worst thing he could do. For Marianne knew the envelope by heart already. The only way of accounting for things of this sort is by imputing to Eblis a conscientious attention to detail. He reaps his reward, as we know, the smallest interventions often yielding a profit. This remark is suggested by Challis's decision, after his wife had left the room, that the Devil was in it.

Has all this incident of Bob's phonograph been worth recording? Certainly it has. Because, coming as it did on the top of Mrs. Steptoe's reminiscence, and Mrs. Challis's visit to Tulse Hill, it blocked explanations by supplying reasons for the attitude of that hill—reasons valid enough to throw dust in the eyes of Mrs. Challis. The phonograph ruction was an effect, not a cause of ill-temper, and poor Bob was really a victim, not a prime mover in it. It did not matter much to him, for his release was not long delayed, and reinstatement and compensation folllowed somehow. Besides, his father took him to hear the *Barbiere di Siviglia* before he went back to school. But he refused to admit that Melba was any better than her record would be, if he might only buy it for three bob.

By itself the Steptoe incident might have been explained. So might Challis's correspondence with Judith, or might never have attracted attention. It was the correlation of each to each, and the visit to Tulse Hill, with the subtle touch of Charlotte Eldridge at critical points, that provoked the dissension over the boy's harmless instrument of torture, and gave the Devil his opportunity.

Mrs. Steptoe had never recognized the young man whom she remembered as Harris, who, of course, was Challis himself. But the identification was in the air—bound to be made sooner or later. Although Mrs. Challis kept silence towards her husband, she lost no time in recurring to the subject with Mrs. Steptoe. Her own penetration had gone very little way, but Mrs. Eldridge had not been behindhand in finding out that either Kate Verrall had been thrice married, or that the second husband of the Brighton story was Challis himself. Charlotte would not have made a bad female detective. "Don't be a goose!" said she to her bewildered friend. "Don't give the woman any hints. Show her an old photograph of your husband, and see if she doesn't recognize it." Marianne did so, and it was straightway identified as that young Mr. Harris. "But," said she, "that is Mr. Challis, before we were married." Aunt Stingy, completely taken aback for a moment, recovered herself with great presence of mind and laid claim to having said many things she never had said the first minute she set eyes on Mr. Challis. In a very little while she persuaded herself she had known him at once. But she could not be induced to admit that she had got the name wrong; and as it was quite unimportant that she should do so, both ladies agreed to leave her unconvinced.

Mrs. Eldridge's suggestion was made at her own semi-detached residence, a quarter of an hour's walk from the Hermitage, where she and Marianne were reviewing the position some days after "it" occurred. The latter had been dwelling on a suggestion of her mother's, a very stupid old woman, that her husband had been, and still was, ignorant of poor Kate's first marriage.

"*Ab*solutely impossible, dear!" said the authority. "Thing couldn't be! Besides, she would have had to be twice a widow, in such a very short time, if this young man Harris wasn't your husband. He *must* have been." And then she added her detective suggestion, as recorded, and the result removed all chance of acquittal on this score.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT ROYD AGAIN. THE BREAD OF IDLENESS. A GOOD PLAIN COOK. A DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PRIEST AND A PROFANE AUTHOR. THE RECTORY AND ITS GUEST, LIZARANN. HOW THE CARRIAGE DIDN'T STOP

THAT Whitsuntide the may-trees were thick with bloom at Royd when Marianne Challis once for all flatly decided not to accompany her husband there. As for him, he couldn't possibly refuse to go merely because she wouldn't. And when you particularly want to do anything, intrinsic impossibility to refuse to do it is always welcome. So on an early day in June Challis found himself again on the lawn at Royd; not exactly breathing freely because Marianne had refused to join the party, but distinctly glad that he was not called on to speculate as to what she would have said or done in this contingency or that, or which of the guests she would have fallen out with, or the extent to which he would have been bound to try to lubricate the situation, or the exact nature of the mess he would have made of it. Marianne had decided the matter, in spite of *bona fide* efforts on his part to reverse her decision. He had made them *bona fide,* in the interest of his conscience later on.

Anyhow, that was all settled, and he could inhale the aroma of the may-trees and the lilacs, and identify the note of the wood-pigeon—he was just bucolic enough for that—and pretend he meant blackbird when he said nightingale, and, in short, betray his Cockney origin *ad libitum,* while basking on the lawn in the first enjoyment of his escape from the hoots and shrieks and petroleum-stench of town. For even Wimbledon Common is not exempt. And nowhere can the music and the silence—strange compound!—of the world of growing trees go home more strongly to the jaded sense of a mere town-rat than in the charmed circle of a park-girt home, with centuries of repose behind and possible decades of conservation ahead. Not too many, because that would savour of sentimentalism; and it is always our duty to be prosaic in the interests of an advancing Civilization. Not too many, in this case of Royd, because that would imply too great a delay in the development of the wealth of coal that is known to exist below the beech and cedar of the three-mile drive, and the woods of ash and oak the

deer and the keepers have pretty nearly kept to themselves since the days of William the Socialist. And when the coal comes, what that means in the end is—perhaps more people! Never mind what sort! Don't bother!

Don't bother! That was Alfred Challis's view of the Universe in two words as he settled down to the enjoyment of faultless afternoon tea, which would be a little stronger presently for those who waited; of the society of his hostess, the Rector, and two of the previous chits; of whom one, the young soldier's idol of last September, was drawling with sweetness, but without interest, to oblige. She was looking frequently towards the house. Challis said to himself that she need not be uneasy, because *he* would come, all right enough, in due time. He knew this, because they had ridden from Euston together, and talked about tobacco the whole way, that being their only topic in common. When the young man appeared, with the visible benediction on his head of two ivory-backed hair-brushes with no handles—which Challis had seen when a dressing-case was opened in the train for a moment—the young lady received him ceremoniously, almost distantly. Never mind!—thought the author to himself—they'll be romping like school-children the minute we oldsters are turned off.

There was no one else yet, of all a large house-party; nearly the same as in September, said Lady Arkroyd. She apologized for this to Mr. Challis, who replied that he, too, was nearly the same as in September, if not quite, and that it was a coincidence. He hoped his identity would be as welcome to the house-party as its would be to him. Lady Arkroyd smiled acquiescence without analysis. She remained gracefully on the surface of things, confident that all would go well below it in the hands, for instance, of an eminent, if sometimes puzzling novelist. Lady Arkroyd had not the insight of Judith, Challis perceived. He indulged a disposition to detect insight in Judith. *Geist* in that quarter made their relation—not that they had any, mind you!—plausible and warrantable.

There may have been concession to some such relativity in her ladyship's remark that Judith would not be back till dinner. Challis fell flat over it, not knowing whether he ought to say, "Cheer up!—I can wait," or shed tears. Athelstan Taylor relieved the position by saying that he hoped Miss Arkroyd had stopped on her way at the Rectory, as he wanted her to see the little girl. Then her ladyship bestowed on Challis, for a snack, as it were, the odd chit, who was at a loose end, devised her to him by name, and went back to a talk on local games at Providence

with the Rector. The chit's name, however improbable it may seem, was Lady Henrietta Mounttullibardine, and she did not look as if she could live up to it. She coloured at intervals, and seemed hushed. Challis distinctly saw her want to say something several times, and give it up. He encouraged her tenderly, and in time she confessed that she really wanted to know whether it was Pepperstraw, in Challis's last novel, that hit upon the idea of using digitalis, or Bessie. He told her, and she retired on her information, in awe at having spoken to a live author. Challis could listen undisturbed to the conversation of the Parson and their hostess.

"There is something very engaging about the child," said the latter. "Of course, she has that defect. The mouth is too large for beauty. But she cossets up to you nicely, and opens her eyes wide. The eyes are fine in themselves, and remind me of . . . oh dear!—what was that girl's name, now, in Somersetshire? I can't recollect the least." Athelstan Taylor felt helpless, and was wondering if it would be legitimate to say never mind, when her ladyship decided that it didn't matter, and continued: "Sir Murgatroyd is quite of our opinion, that it would never do to let the child lapse."

"Never do at all!" said the Rector. "Indeed, even if the child were not there, I should be very reluctant to lose sight of the father. I suspect, too, that the people at the cottage—where I put him to stay, you know—wouldn't thank me for taking him away. It's very curious to me how a man with such qualifications for being an encumbrance can manage to make himself welcome at all. But he's become very popular there, especially with old Margy. She says it's like a clock to hear him tell. I think she means that he goes on chatting in a pleasant, easy kind of way. Sea stories, you know—that sort of thing!"

"Didn't you say he was inclined to give trouble?—they *are* troublesome sometimes." She referred, no doubt, to the *intransigeant* pauper population, and their natural love of independence combined with outdoor relief.

"I didn't mean exactly troublesome in that sense. Troublesomely averse to giving trouble, perhaps I should have said. He never said anything to me, but old Margy is in his confidence. It seems that that sister of his—the Steptoe woman, you know? . . . oh yes!—*you* know—the woman whose husband was drowned in the lock—the *delirium tremens* man . . ."

"*Delirium tremens* man?" said her ladyship dimly. And then suddenly, "Oh yes, I know, of course," almost in one word.

Challis listened with stimulated attention, and Mr. Taylor continued:

"Well!—she's Jim Coupland's sister, you see—and it seems that she used to twit him with eating the bread of idleness before he took to the retail match-trade. He considers that he is eating the bread of idleness now. Perhaps he is. But he is submitting, until he is strong on his legs again—that's his expression. Besides, we have made a composition, and half his keep is to be deducted from his savings. By-the-bye . . ." The Rector paused, with recollection on his face.

Lady Arkroyd's speech is apt to have a superseding character—to pass by lesser folks' unimportant remarks. "I liked the father at the Hospital," she says indifferently. "I hope the child isn't going to be delicate." Mr. Taylor was arrested long enough to say, oh dear no!—oh no, it was or would be all right as far as that went—and then left it, whatever it was, to finish his own beginning.

"I was just going to say what an odd chance it was that Mr. Challis's housekeeping should have absorbed Mrs. Steptoe. How does the woman answer, Challis?" For, as we have heard, these two gentlemen had become fairly well acquainted last September, in spite of the cloth of the one and the predisposition of the other—a better word for the case than "antipathies," which had almost crept into the text. One or two country-walk chats had ended in Challis giving the Rev. Athelstan practical absolution for his black stock and silk waistcoat, and the latter reflecting much on the figments of mediæval creed and formulary that make a gulf between so many intellects with concord at the root, and play into the hands of their common enemy, the Devil. Why was he glad that his friend Gus was safe in London dabbling in incense, coquetting with Holy Water, preaching Immaculate Conceptions, and not letting his left hand know that his right hand had renounced the Bishop of Rome—when a visitor like Challis might accrue at any moment at Royd Rectory, as per promise given eight months ago? Why?—simply because he felt that the bridge of his own liberality, however long the span of it, was not enough to cover the great gulf! And there was Ahriman, chuckling all the while!

"I am given to understand that Mrs. Steptoe is a good plain cook," was Challis's answer to the Rector's question. Something in the manner of it seemed to throw doubt on his good faith. Otherwise, why seek confirmatory evidence, as his hearers seemed to do?

"I suppose you dine at home?" said the Rector, going to the point.

"I don't judge so much by that. It wouldn't be fair to do so,

because I gather that in our house the flues don't act, and the best kitchen-coal at twenty shillings has no burn in it, and goes to cender in no time. Also we have no saucepans the right size. Also our greengrocer supplies us with potatoes which on peeling turn out irregular polyhedrons. So it doesn't do to be biassed by what we get to eat. But I am convinced she is a good plain cook."

Lady Arkroyd was accepting all Challis said in the spirit of Bradshaw. A territorial lady knows nothing of the small domesticities of any middle class. The Rector, perceiving a danger ahead—a new-born interest in the peculiar potatoes obtaining in suburban villas—headed Lady Arkroyd off just as she had begun, "What very curious pota . . .!" without a smile.

"Challis isn't in earnest," said he. "It's only his chaff." Her ladyship said, "Oh!" and looked puzzled—awaited enlightenment. Challis laughed, admitting jurisdiction. But he pleaded in extenuation of his offence that it was difficult to fight against the conviction that Mrs. Steptoe was a good plain cook—whatever direct evidence there was to the contrary—in the face of her apron and the material of her dress, her punctual attendance at chapel, her handwriting and its blots, her arithmetic and its totals. She really had all the qualities of a good plain cook, except the bald and crude ability to do plain cookery—a thing no one who looks below the surface ever bothers over.

"I'm afraid the good woman's a bit of a humbug," was Athelstan Taylor's conclusion. It was welcomed by the lady, as a relief to the necessity for smiling in a well-bred way—a Debretticent way, call it—while queer arrivals from below uttered paradoxes on Olympus.

Judith might be late; she was at Thanes. Challis pretended he hadn't known this. But he knew well enough that the young lady had forgiven the Castle, because they were going to have theatricals; and she, with an imputed experience, had been petitioned to accept the principal part. All this was in her last letter, written to Challis at his club. It had also told him that William Rufus, her brother, would not be at Royd for a few days, as he was busy in town over the Great Idea, which was going to be a very great Idea indeed, as some men had come forward and were going to put a good deal of Capital into it. Challis had said, "Dear me! —how like! . . ." and had not finished the sentence.

A little thing occurred that amused the novelmonger's heart and stirred his sympathies. When he began talking with his hostess and the Rector, he had turned his back on the chit and the young soldier. When, as the Rector's departure provoked dispersal, he

looked their way again—behold!—they had vanished, as by magic. "I think," said the second chit, "they have gone for a walk to Fern Hollow." And thenceforward there was a consciousness about this young couple and their destiny between Mr. Challis and the second chit. For had she not detected his thought about them, when his eyes looked for them and found them not?

The other visitors, some of whom were as identical with those of September as circumstance permits in such a case, were scattered about elsewhere, subject to well-grounded confidences that they would be back to dinner. And the only important variation of identity among these was that one had become a Confirmed Christian Scientist. Challis didn't know whether he was expected to be glad or sorry.

He became somehow aware that her ladyship was going to drive to Thanes Castle accompanied by the second chit, to bring Judith back. Also that he was not going to be asked to accompany her. "*What* is Mr. Challis going to do if we all forsake him?" spoken with a sweet smile, left no doubt on the point. Mr. Challis had a letter he must write; so that was settled.

"You haven't got a letter to write, Challis," said the Rector at the front gate, to which both had walked in company. "Come some of the way with me, and talk as profanely as you like. I won't go fast." For the resolute stride of a pedestrian had made Challis cry for mercy in September.

"Yes—it was a lie about the letter," said he. "But it was good and unselfish in me to tell it. Saved bother, in fact! Can you wait two minutes while I put on walking-boots?"

"I can wait five, luckily; which I take it is your meaning." He waited six, beguiling them by letting the gate swing to and fro, and noting what a long time it took to reach equilibrium. "Wait a second," said he to Challis, arriving booted at the end of the fourth experiment. "Let's see how long it means to go on!" And then, having settled the point, the two were walking along the great avenue through the murmur of the beeches, conscious of a dispute between the woodlands and the hay-fields as to which was adding the sweeter flavour to the air of heaven.

Neither spoke at first. Then Challis said, as though still thinking over recent words: "Why 'as profanely as I liked'? I am a Profane Author, certainly, in the old sense of the word. Was that what you meant?"

"Why—yes! That is, if that was the sense you used the word in the last time we talked together, in September. Do you remember? You said you always had diabolical promptings towards

profanity in the presence of anything sacred. Then you said my cloth was conventionally sacred, and that made matters worse."

"I remember. We were getting very candid. You said you liked it."

"So I did. I said what I said just now because I wanted to go on where we left off. We were just going to quarrel healthily when Mr. Brownrigg pointed out that in the millennium of Grauboschthe impious man would have no cause for despondency. The class of Insulated Ideas, evolved from the theory of Metaphysical Checks, will at once provide the Dogmatist with materials, and the Blasphemer with an object to give his attention to. . . ."

"I remember. If I belonged to the latter class, I shouldn't be a Grauboschite. Too much like Temperance Drinks, that make you feel as if you were drunk. . . ." Challis arrested his own speech, as if he had had enough of triviality, and spoke seriously. "I want you to tell me something, without any reserve."

"Go on. I will, if I can."

"You read one of my books, I know . . . what!—two more since September!—fancy that! . . . Well—what was your impression? As to what we are speaking of, I mean. Did it strike you that I made light of subjects usually held sacred?"

"It struck me that you did not hold them sacred. I do not mean a syllable more than I say. Your writing, so far as I have read it, is negative."

"I have wished to keep it so. Why should any author try to disturb or unsettle beliefs that he cannot replace—even by a Metaphysical Check? You remember what I said to you last year, just the other side of where the brook runs across the road on its own account, by the little footbridge? . . . well!—it was quite true. I have no antipathy to any beliefs of other people, having none of my own. I merely take exception to the recitation of Creeds."

"Even when the reciter is free to choose silence."

"If he stands up it comes to the same thing."

"He needn't unless he likes. At least, in my Church."

"Then suppose he *does* believe some of it, is he to jump up and down? There must be what my Bob calls a good few persons who believe the first seven and the last four words of the Creed . . . well!—the regular Creed—you know which one I mean . . . and you could hardly expect them to sit still all through the business part of the recitation and cut in at the end."

"You're only half serious, Challis. Your inveterate propensity to quips of thought and paradox, as it is called, misleads you and

spoils your talk. Surely a declaration of faith is an intrinsic necessity in a communion! How can it exist otherwise?"

"You must keep the disbelievers out—is that it?" Challis thought it time for a cigar. When he had got it lighted, he resumed: "Yes!—as a means of constructing communions, Creeds are invaluable. The communion that had none would be too big. As for me, I never can help thinking of those lines:

> "'One all too sure of God to need
> That token to the world without
> Of homage paid by faith to doubt,
> The recitation of a Creed.'

. . . Where do they come from, did you say? 'In Memoriam,' I suppose."

"Can't recollect them! . . . I wish you would tell me what you understand by the word 'believe.'"

"I'm very doubtful. It just depends on how I use it. When I tell my wife that I believe her letter has gone to the Post, my meaning is clear. I mean that I didn't see it on the hall-table when I last looked. When I say that I believe I am engaged on Thursday, it is equally unmistakable. I mean that I don't want to meet the So-and-so's at your house, morning-dress. But when I say, as I am apt to do, that I believe in God Almighty, I do so with a misgiving that my meaning is not intelligible to myself. Perhaps I regard my speech as a civility to the absolutely Unknown—I really couldn't say. Or it may be I only use it in fulfilment of a convention which, so long as I comply with its conditions, binds all the other signatories not to bother."

"You always make me think you are going to be serious, and then you go off at a tangent. I never have any doubt what I mean by the word . . ."

"What, for instance?"

"Whatever my mind does not question, I believe."

"Then the Creed might be reworded, 'I don't and won't question the existence of God the Father,' and so on. Somehow it doesn't sound convincing."

"Because it seems to imply that the question is an open one."

"And saying you believe it doesn't? I'm agreeable, if you're satisfied. But, then, you see, I stop away from Church, by hypothesis. And I should do so just the same if the re-wording were made. Nokes and Stokes and Styles and Brown and Thompson in a row, shouting that they didn't and wouldn't question the existence of God Almighty, would keep me out just as much as if they said they 'believed' in Him."

They walked on a little in silence, the Rector very thoughtful. Presently he said, rather as one who comes to a sudden conclusion: "My definition of the word doesn't cover it. One means more . . ."

"And doesn't exactly know what," said Challis.

"Precisely. But isn't it possible that the common use of a word long received among many people may, from the habit of its usage, acquire a meaning to each and all alike, and yet continue to baffle definition?"

"Very possible indeed, and certain. I know a case in point. I went to a sort of spiritualistic *séance* once, and in the course of operations the audience was requested to *will* powerfully. To my surprise, all the *habitués* seemed prepared to comply as a matter of course. One young man said, 'How?' but was sat upon by public opinion. I heard him after ask a friend, 'How did *you* will'? And the reply was: 'I held my breath and caught firmly hold of four-and-sixpence in my breeches pocket. How did you?' He answered that he had shut his eyes tight and thought of his toes. But all the faithful—these two were outsiders, like myself—seemed to know what to do; and did it right, I suppose, because an accordion played. They had found out what *willing* meant, by habit and telepathic interchange. Probably believers know in the same way what is meant by belief. But it's no use outsiders holding their breath and thinking of their toes."

This sort of chat continued till the two reached the Rectory. It is given in the story to throw light on the friendship that sprang up between two such opposites, or seeming opposites.

When one walks part of the way home with a friend, Euclid's axioms get flawed sometimes, for the whole of the way is no greater than its part. Challis went all the way to the Rectory, of course; said he wouldn't come in, of course; said he mustn't sit down, of course; did so, of course; and kept his eye on his watch, of course. Having complied with all forms and precedents, he started to walk back.

His short visit had given him odds and ends of human things to think of. That was the Rector's sister-in-law, that dry lady who had made him feel tolerated; and that other one who had begged him not to throw his cigar away was only an old friend. Challis was sorry the reverse was not the case, for the Rector's sake. He felt that the old friend might be kissed with advantage to the kisser, while the officially permissible peck of the dry lady's cheek could not be a source of satisfaction to any connoisseur. It was a thought entirely on his friend's behalf—he himself was indifferent.

However, he might be wrong. The dry lady seemed very congenial to the two little girls, her nieces, who, it appeared—hurriedly, for his visit was short—had engaged a nurse for their baby. Challis suspected that a dispute between the two children, which the dry lady peremptorily silenced, turned on a question of paternity. Which of them was to be the baby's papa? It seemed late in the day for considering the point, thought Challis. The oldest sister was *always* the papa, said that claimant; and confirmed it by adding, "Eliza Ann says so, and she knows." The colloquy was half-heard, but this seemed the upshot.

That little Eliza Ann in the blue cotton dress—the nurse in this drama—was, of course, the little girl whose mouth was too large for beauty; Mrs. Steptoe's brother's child. How small the world was! "So is the kid herself, for that matter," was Challis's reflection thereon; a typical instance of the whimsical way his mind twisted things. He would have said it aloud with perfect gravity to any hearer, had he had one.

She was a nice little wench, anyhow, the nurse, with her great big eyes and her Cockney-up-to-date accent. Also Challis had noted her quickness in repeating words just heard. "The biby is on no attount to be wyked," she had said, with an earnest sense of the reality of her part. *"O si sic omnes!"* Challis had thought to himself.

But the nurse forgot herself the moment after, saying: "I must sow this biby to my daddy, tomollow—maten't I?" However, she resumed her part at once, on assurance given. She was certainly to show that baby to her daddy. And he would feel it, and see how fat it was. Thereon Challis had remembered what had till then escaped his mind, that Mrs. Steptoe's brother was eyeless and half legless. Oh, what an indurated baby, for an appreciator dependent on touch alone! And, oh, the stony glare of its eyes fixed on the zenith, when roused from sleep by a practicable wire in its spine!

A man with a permanent source of disquiet always lights on something to remind him of it, go where he may. Challis had succeeded on his way from London in persuading himself that the warmth of his own farewell to Marianne had been more than skin-deep, whatever hers was; and had felt that he could justifiably stand his own self-reproaches over, and enjoy the day that was passing, without remorse. And then what must he needs come across, of all things in the world, but a sister-in-law! Not one certainly resembling in the least the sister-in-law of a decade past, whom she reminded him of! There was nothing in this one of the girl who then, in the language of Oliver, bestowed herself

like a ripe sister, and was accepted with a sense that she more than made up for a too mature mother-in-law, and put the advantages of marriage outside all question. Nothing of Marianne then or now, for that matter, in the dry lady personally; but much to remind him of his own case in the way she had taken over the two little girls, much as Marianne had taken over Bob.

Was it his fault—the whole thing? For there was a "whole thing" by now. He could not disguise that whole thing from himself, and that it was a thing that had somehow grown, slowly and surely, since the first days when he and Marianne were rejoicing together in the dark front parlour of the Great Coram Street house over a letter just come from the publishers, Saxby's, Ltd., which accepted "The Spendthrift's Legacy," and named terms which led to a calculation that success, followed by a book per annum equally successful, would yield two thousand a year; and to castles in Spain, the building of which would have cost that sum twice over.

Or, if not from that hour exactly, it had grown since the days of the success that followed. It was hard to say when it began. Was he aware of it—of "the whole thing"—when Marianne refused to go with him to Lady Horse's because the Honourable Mrs. Diamonds had been rude to her first, and encouraged her after? These were not the ladies' real names, but everything else held good. Marianne had then said that once was quite enough, and she knew all along exactly how it was going to be, ever since that woman in skirts had given herself such airs—a reference to a previous delinquent. Oh dear!—now suppose the Honourable Diamonds had not "encouraged" her—how then? Anyhow, Challis could see now, too late, what he ought to have done. He ought to have taken bulls by the horns, and bits in his teeth, and opportunities by their forelocks, and said flatly that *he* wouldn't go to Lady Horse's unless Marianne came, too. It was his going that once without her that had done it! And all because of the confounded good-nature of that diamond woman, who must needs go *encouraging* her. That was what hurt the most, a thousandfold. The Diamonds might have stood on Marianne's lilac silk all day long, and broken that little crickly man's arm with her fan, if she chose, and her victim would have forgiven it. But when she came off, she scarcely apologized. And then, after that, to *encourage her!*

Still, in those days he was not aware of "the whole thing" that had "come about." Suspicion that something was amiss was followed by belief that the something had melted away. Intermit-

tent phases succeeded, now and then with an appearance of concession to Society on Marianne's part; occasional acceptances of invitations to houses where Challis innocently hoped all had gone well, till he found himself driving home with a hurt and silent lady, and came to know that the very things he had fondly fancied almost angelic ebullitions of sweetness in their hostess were really only the woman's impertinence; and that what seemed to him good-humoured informality in her daughters was nothing but that sort of hoydenishness that seemed to be thought the proper thing nowadays. He could recall many incidents of this description, yet none that seemed to warrant the evolution of married discomfort—of disintegrated family life—that kept on gaining slowly, slowly on his resistance to it.

It had intensified, he knew, since his first visit to Royd in September. It was mixed up with his professional association with Judith Arkroyd. It *was* a professional relation, and nothing else. He called the ancestral beeches of the family to bear witness to the utter impossibility of its being anything else. If he, Alfred Challis, ex-accountant, ephemeral scribbler of an empty day, was conscious of a certain warmth in his admiration for that lady, that was *his* concern—not even the business of the beech-trees, or the new young fern he was treading underfoot. It would remain a buried secret, unknown to all men, most of all to Judith herself. He would even, as an act of discipline, never think of it but to question its reality, as he did now. It was to die, and should do so. At least he could keep his own counsel about this soul-quake, heart-quake, self-quake—call it what you will!—admitting that one existed. If he failed to do so successfully, would he be the first man that had ever loved two women, and been forced to hide away his love for one from the other and herself? But he was obliged to admit that this was the first time he had allowed the word "love" to be heard in his intercourse with himself on this subject, even as an hypothesis.

He was relieved to observe the pleasure he felt in the thought that, at any rate, Polly Anne need never know anything about it. *She* need never have any real cause for a moment's disquiet. Of course, any *groundless* suspicions she might choose to nourish were entirely her own look-out. He could only recognize those that had a warrant in reality. She should not be provided with materials for any such. Of course, Polly Anne *was* Polly Anne, after all, and her happiness must always be a first consideration with him. Think of all their old days together! Think of his hours of acute misery, when that young monkey Emmie, five years ago, must needs

imperil her mother's life and her own by her indecent haste to see the World. Think, never too often, of his gratitude to her when she took him, a mere derelict, in tow, ten years since, and piloted him into safe waters. Think as much as possible of her many nursings of him—of the many pipes they had virtually had together, though he was the operative smoker—of the many welcomes he had looked forward to. And as little as possible of the shortness of temper that had certainly grown upon her, but was very likely only a phase of health that would one day pass away and be forgotten. Remember that confounded little monkey—bless her! of course—and be forbearing to her mother.

There was one thought about her that twisted and tortured this victim of over-self-examination beyond all reason. Look how utterly, how almost terribly, Polly Anne had replaced poor Kate! Surely the Great Unknown had made a record in cruelty when he created Love the Monopolist! Why feel shocked because, after Kate had ceased, her sister had taken over her inheritance so thoroughly? Besides, this entire supersession of poor Kate showed him how really devoted he was to Marianne, and how safe he and she were from intrusions from without. It never struck him as strange that he should be seeking for assurance that he loved his own wife.

It probably would have done so, in time, if his reflections had not been interrupted at this point. The sound of the carriage—with Judith in it, no doubt—returning from Thanes. Saladin, the huge boarhound, coming on the scene first, examined Mr. Challis without any sign of recognition, and seemed to decide that he had nothing contraband about him. Then he waited till the carriage he had charge of came in sight, and trotted on. The import of his demeanour was that an appointment awaited him at the house, but that he could find time to see that carriage and pair to the door—if only it wouldn't dawdle!

Whether it was from consideration for Saladin, or because it was haughty, that carriage hardly stopped. Its pause was barely long enough to say, through the mixed and hurried inspirations of its occupants, that it could bring itself to accommodate Mr. Challis on the front seat. Mr. Challis, alive to the importance of not sitting down on miscellanea, preferred walking; for all that the miscellanea professed readiness to be quite happy elsewhere. It was only a step to the house now. And Saladin was waiting. All right—go on!

Why should Challis feel something akin to pique because that carriage and pair took him at his word and went on, all right?

Why need that unfortunate propensity of the foot-passenger beset him, the vice of mind that ascribes every action of a two-horse carriage to aristocratic pride? Perhaps he wanted to file an accusation against something or someone, and was not ready to admit that Judith's majestic smile and head-inclination had anything to do with it. Anyhow, the rest of his step to the house associated itself with a warm forgiving feeling towards Polly Anne the tiresome, the miffy; and an intensified sense of outsideness as to his own social whereabouts; the insidedness being that of a fold with Sir Bernard Burke for shepherd, and Rouge Dragon and Garter King-at-arms for collie dogs.

He arrived at the house to find the world flocking to dress for dinner, or doing it already, out of sight. Flying cordialities from members of the family, unseen till then, or visitors known to him previously, intercepted him in his flight up the great staircase; but innuendoes from well-informed contemporaries that dinner was at a quarter to eight justified abruptness and pointed to opportunities for explanation. Challis escaped to his room, and found his external self of the evening to come—all but the head and hands he had on—laid out upon the bed, waiting patiently to be scrambled into in a hurry, and have its studs and buttons sworn at.

But he was not destined to be the last in the drawing-room, although he thought it could not be otherwise. For when he arrived at the foot of the stairs, it was with a consciousness on him of having heard, as in a waking-dream, the sweetest possible drawl to the following effect: "It was awl yaw fault. It wawsn't mine one bit," and a male reply, with the climax of human contentment in every syllable, "I'm jolly glad—it lasted so much longer?" and then a headlong rush to a chaotic toilette.

And that young man's appearance seven minutes later, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, would have done honour to a lightning transformationist. But the distant manner of the guilty couple was carried too far, as everybody guessed all about it, and would have done so even without the furtive looks they exchanged from either end of a long table.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW JUDITH'S STAGE MANIA HAD COOLED. TROUT BEND, AND A TICKLISH INTERVIEW. HALF-A-MILE OFF TEA. A DISCUSSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE story has scarcely room for anything that was said or done at Royd until two days after the reunion that closed the last chapter. All it wants may be told in a few words. Challis was sulky all the rest of the first evening, and would not admit it to himself. Judith was dignified, glittering, and universal; talked to everybody, whereas Challis wanted her to talk to him. She was judicious, no doubt—woman of the world, and so on—but was it necessary to carry it so far? Surely Marianne in the background safeguarded the situation?

The party made itself at home rapidly, having begun at an advantage from previous experience. On the third day after its arrival any two members of it were ripe for arranging their day in each other's pockets, and treating their hosts as a sort of lay innkeepers of benevolent dispositions, but quite negligible. Challis had taken the latter at their word when they said he was to stop in his room and write all day if he liked. He had brought his MS. of "Estrild" with him, and had made up his mind to complete it. The play would have its value, even if the Estrild he had set his heart on, and had written the part for, decided on not attempting it.

For a doubt had crept into the scheme as it stood when Challis paid that visit to the sprained-ankle patient in Grosvenor Square. Something had influenced Judith since then; probably some passage of arms with her family. At least, so Challis surmised. But she had told him next to nothing, so far. Her passing lameness had occasioned a break in tentative readings of the play, in which others than herself had taken part; and during this interruption it had been evident that the young lady's ambition to fly in the face of Society and family tradition had undergone a change. But the invitation to Royd at Whitsuntide remained in black and white, and could not be gainsaid.

Therefore, Challis had found himself on that well-remembered

lawn, as recorded in our last chapter, at the time appointed, with no misgiving on him at the moment as to the cordiality of his welcome. Nothing had happened to create one. But as the hours grew to a day, and then to days, he began to be conscious somehow that his hosts had towards him a feeling they were too well-bred to show; and not only that, but that an indefinable discomfort had arisen between himself and Judith. Something had flawed the relation that each called friendship, and refrained from speculating about any other designation for. He had recognized this consciousness for the first time at that moment beside the carriage. And the reason he so readily accepted her ladyship's permission to indulge his inspirations *ad libitum* in his own room was that he felt it was a sort of release to him to do so. Was it a release for them also?—for Judith?

If this visit was to be no more than the fulfilment of an invitation to which his hosts stood pledged, let him work it out like a term of penal servitude, and go his ways at the end of it. But he chafed at the impossibility of challenging the position in any way. How in the name of common-sense could he say to the Baronet or her ladyship, "I see through your persistent amiability of manner that your feelings towards this eminent author are not the same to a nicety as they were six months since, and I should like to review the situation with you, with a view to the removal of misunderstandings"?

Still less was it possible to say to Judith, "You know that an indescribable change of manner has come over you in your demeanour towards your humble admirer, and he would give worlds to know the cause of it. But, in consideration of a certain effect you have upon him, of a certain exaltation he experiences in your presence, a certain depression at your absence, a very certain exasperation at any suspicion of a slight to him in favour of another male, he much doubts his powers of self-command through an explanatory interview. So he cannot ask questions. But if you could, with your womanly tact, frame some communication that would let him know what-the-anything it is all about, he would feel very grateful."

The position was a delicate one, with that necessity in the background for locking his heart up tight, for the sake of Polly Anne, of whom—odd though it may seem—he never lost sight. Only he never actually formulated an admission of its delicacy. The nearest approach to it was when a sudden image of Mr. John Eldridge flashed across his mental bioscope, shut one of its eyes, and said, "Rather ticklish, Master Titus—eh?"

Very few people will understand the odd freaks of Challis's mind, but it is useless to write this story and omit them.

There was only one thing he was absolutely clear about. Nothing the word *dishonourable* would apply to was admissible into any hypothetical drama his mind would construct, to cut the—rather hypothetical, please!—Gordian knot of his relation to Judith. He pictured himself to himself as potentially Don Juan, Captain Macheath, Silenus, or the late Prince Regent, as far as his normal ideas of morality went; but *he* was one thing, mind you, and Judith was another! She, being what she was, made any speculations in that department irrelevant. They did not arise from any question before the House. Besides—her position! Think of it!

He never contrasted his estimation of Judith now with his rough valuation of her at first sight. Just a handsome woman—the fine contents of an expensive, well-cut dress—a fit mate for fifty thousand a year, deer-forests in Scotland, houses in Park Lane, opera-boxes, and newspaper paragraphs! If he had done so, might he not have suspected, in the exaggeration of thought that placed her above and beyond suspicion, an element of danger more formidable to him than the imaginary laxity he was so ready to credit himself with. He might at least have seen the moral imbecility of what was virtually an appeal to Judith's self-respect and integrity to protect him from his own weakness. Perhaps he had subcutaneous misgivings of the correctness of his insight into her character when he decided that it would never do to tempt confidences of a personal nature.

If a friendship between a man and a woman is to remain contented with itself, seeking neither promotion nor dissolution, there must not be present in it, on the part of either, any longing to gain power over the other. Our own belief is that if Miss Arkroyd's self-love had not felt hurt at what seemed to her a too ready acceptance by Challis of the position in which a slight change in her manner had placed him, he might have paid his visit to Royd, gone back home, and maybe pretended to himself that the still waters of his inner soul had never been ruffled by Judith or any other fashionable enchantress. But a woman's pleasure in the power of her beauty is like that of dram-drinking. She may "swear off," as Rip Van Winkle did, a thousand times—but she will go back and do it again, or die for it. How can she help it, when a glance, a movement, a slight inexplicable intonation of her voice, is enough to bring back to bondage the idiot that thinks he has broken free? Why should she try to help it, from the point of view of self-interest, when she believes—as Judith did,

without misgiving—that she can throw her end of the chain away at any moment, and wash her hands of that booby, and go on to another?

Judith believed her position was security itself, and was a little piqued at the readiness with which Challis had jumped at the permission to withdraw into his own sanctum. Whatever behaviour of her own had influenced this readiness, she resented it as an interruption to an assertion of power she was beginning to feel herself entitled to. Like the dram-drinker, she could not do without it. So, after three days of cordial civility, too dexterous to indite as a change of front, and equally dexterous postponement of Estrild for some future discussion, the young lady, without explanation, resumed the half-familiar, half-patronizing tone Challis had become accustomed to in Grosvenor Square.

Some three days later it happened that this household decided on a sort of picnic known to it as "half-a-mile-off tea." A houseful of able-bodied servants made this festivity, which was exactly what its name implies, easily possible. All the most critical tea-drinker could want had gone before, and the house-party, or most of it, was straggling across the parkland to Fern Hollow, the place appointed. Challis and Judith were accidentally last.

A chance left him the only hearer of a voice dropped languidly for the benefit of his ears alone. "Let these noisy people go on in front, Scroop," said its owner to him; and then, in reply to his amused look at hearing himself so addressed, "I knew I should do it in the end, because of the newspaper reviews. Do you mind my calling you Scroop now and then, by accident?"

"Nothing can please me better," said he. "Biggest compliment you can pay me!" It started the soul-brush afresh, and he had to settle whether it was to be submission or protest. He fancied he could manage the latter even though he acknowledged the voice, that continued, "Suppose we go by Trout Bend! It's nonsense hurrying. The tea can wait. Or we can have fresh made." This was concession, both in the proposed *tête-à-tête,* and something in the familiarity of treatment, which seemed to savour more of the Hermitage than Grosvenor Square. But it was only the simple vocabulary common to all tea-worlds; they are above class distinctions.

"Suppose we do," said Challis. And they did.

Trout Bend is a small incident in Geography. But it has a quality in common with—for instance—the Arctic Circle. It is always the same. Its lower segment has the same merry ripple over the same stones, and its upper one spreads to the same pools,

that foster here and there each year the very selfsame bulrushes, to all appearance. And in the middle of the best one—the one, that is, that lends itself best to self-deception on the part of the fisherman—the fish that leaped last year, when you were looking at it and wondering how deep it was in the middle, does it again, and doesn't bore you. Because if he did, you wouldn't watch for him a third time. Only then he *doesn't* do it again, and that does bore you. And where the pools end and the ripples begin are the same infatuated stepping-stones, that think they can bear your weight, and can't. And then you become spell-bound on them as they wobble, and are rescued by extended walking-sticks from either side, and get across quite dry, or only a very little water in one shoe.

It was all the same this time, certainly, as when Challis was here in the autumn; all but a black swimming-bird, who had nodded a great deal, and surprised him, but not his companion—it was Athelstan Taylor—by diving suddenly and never coming up. The Rector had explained the ways of water hens, and that this slyboots was still under some floating rubbish, with her nose out for breath. Challis remembered wondering whether the whole of this class of birds was feminine, and watercocks only existed in connection with the Company. There was none this time—neither cock nor hen—and the open pastureland this side the beech-covert was all ablaze with buttercups in the high grass. For the fallow-deer found their pasture farther from the house, and never a little tail wagged on a dappled back in sight of Challis and Judith as they crossed the bridge—one slice of an elm-tree, with the outline on it of its trunk of a hundred years ago.

"I suppose you know the legend of this bridge and the convict," said the lady, turning to the gentleman.

"What legend of this bridge and what convict?" His inattention to his words was shown in the way he echoed them—sounds without meaning.

"You must have heard it. When he was a boy—the convict—he was sent with a small package containing a ring to a lady at Tallack's Gate—one of the Cazenoves, I think it was—and on the way he thought it would be good fun to have a look inside his parcel. So he got the ring out, and, standing near this bridge, dropped it. He hunted for it in vain, and then, in terror of his mishap, ran away. I never quite understood it, but I suppose in those days they convicted people very easily . . ."

"Much more than now! Was this chap convicted?"

"Yes—and sent to Botany Bay. Twenty years after, having

served his time, he came back to England, married, and lived to be an old man, but always under a ban. One day he came here, to this spot, with a grown-up daughter to whom he then told the whole tale for the first time. When he finished he said to her: 'I was standing just where you are when I dropped it.' She said, 'Here on the ground, or here on the bridge,' and touched the plank with her parasol. The point of it slipped into a knothole in the wood, and when she drew it out, something glittered on it. It was the ring."

Challis was in the habit of inventing horrors for serials, and had had some success. But it chanced that he had never before heard this story—which, by the way, is told in connection with more than one locality in England—and he envied the master-hand that had fashioned it. He told in exchange the tale of the man who brought what he thought was his wife out of a house on fire, too black for recognition by his scorched and dazzled eyesight, and sat with his hand in hers till a strange voice came from the lips, and asked if the lady had been got out, naming his wife. "But your story is more probable," he in conclusion. "A man would know. . . ."

"Know his own wife's hand? Of course he would! But are we under any obligation to sup full of horrors on a day like this?" Her voice was that of indifference, dismissing an unpleasant topic. Challis slightly resented its placidity, which looked as if the horrors had been easily digested, at least. It seemed to him to do injustice to a sweetness of disposition he chose to consider inseparable from the beautiful eyelids at ease under a slight protest of raised brows—the beautiful lips that waited unclosed for an answer to their question.

"What do you prefer me to talk about?" said he. "The crops? The weather?"

"Nonsense, Scroop!" She paused in her walk, so that he had either to look round at her or show no wish to know why. "I suppose you must have guessed," she said, without logical continuity: A request for explanation would have been warranted.

But Challis was in no mind for make-believe. He took her meaning, which he knew quite well, for granted. "I have had my suspicions," said he. "But I could not catechize, as you seemed so silent. Tell me now! . . . Which is it?—mother—father?—sister? . . . Is it Sibyl?—or the Bart?—or the *madre?*" The way in which these familiar designations were accepted as a matter of course showed how their relations of last September had defined and strengthened themselves.

"All three. At least—I ought to be fair—my father least of all!

Indeed, I believe that if an instance could be found of any lady of William the Conqueror's taking part in a Court performance, he would concede the point altogether. Has he spoken to you about it? . . . Well!—of course he wouldn't do that. But has he 'approached the subject'? Of course, that is what he would do—'approach the subject.'"

"No—no one has said a word about it. But I guessed, soon after I came down, that the play was doomed. I did not at first suppose it was your family, as a matter of course. I thought you might have settled to throw it up on your own account." She made a sort of impatient disclaimer—a head-shake that flung that possibility aside, and forgot it. But she said nothing, and he continued: "There was a row, I suppose? Don't tell me more about it than you like. Don't tell me anything if you . . ."

"I prefer to tell you. Who is there that I can talk to about it if not to you?" This was the soul-brush again; and again Challis's inner consciousness gasped at the choice he had to make between giving way to a luxury, a dangerous intoxication, and attempting to freeze the conversation down to a safe temperature.

Duty dictated a struggle for the latter. He affected a manner of equable unconcern fairly well. "No one," said he, "unless you were to make a confidante of . . ." He stopped short of saying "Marianne," conscious of difficulties ahead. But he could shelve the side-issue, and fall back on the previous question with a sense of getting out of shoal water. "There *was* a row, then . . . well—a warm discussion, suppose we say? It's more refined, certainly. What form did it take?"

"Then we mustn't go so quick," said Judith. "Or I shan't have time." She was inconsecutive; but it was clear, when she paused in her walk through the long grass, that it was for an anchorage. "Suppose we sit down a little here," she said. "Unless you mind?" Challis didn't.

"Here" was an oak trunk that must have said to itself when it was a sapling—four hundred years ago, maybe—"I will see to it, when I am grown up, that my roots shall live above ground, and be thick with moss; and one shall be horizontal and a seat for a king, who shall lean against me contented. But he shall go, that lovers may come; and they shall make up *my* contentment, and I shall hear their voices in the twilight." Challis half made this little legend as he took his place by Miss Arkroyd on that tree-trunk. But he fought shy of the sequel their presence suggested—what word ought his fancy to supply as the tree's imaginary speech about themselves? He shrank from it, and he knew the reason

why. It was because, as his own disordered passion grew, as he found himself more and more at loggerheads with his lot, he became more and more alive to the danger of relying on this woman *her*self as his protection against *him*self. How if *she* gave way, too?

As far as any conscious loss of self-control at that moment went, on the part of Miss Judith Arkroyd, Challis need not have fretted. Never was a young woman more perfectly cool and collected, more equal to any occasion that might arise in connection with a love of power that she just felt this man was a satisfactory lay-figure for. That best defines all the feeling she had on his account—so far.

She resumed the conversation where the question of anchorage had interrupted her. "I don't think we have rows in our family, in the ordinary sense of the word. That is, if I understand it rightly. . . . No!—I know what you are going to say. It has nothing to do with that repose that marks the caste of Vere de Vere. It is entirely individual and local. We have our quarrels, of course, but they take the form of distant civility, entirely due, as I understand, to our self-respect. There is nothing we Arkroyds respect more than ourselves, not even the Bill of Rights or the Protestant Succession. . . ."

Challis interrupted: "But the distant civility, this time? . . ."

"Followed naturally on my telling Sibyl that the first act of Estrild was ready for rehearsal. She merely said she supposed I must go my own way. But that day after lunch she allowed me to leave the apartment first. It had been a cold lunch, as far as emotions went; and I knew, when Sibyl stood courteously on one side to let me pass, what was coming. So I wasn't the least surprised to find a letter from my mother on the dressing-table next morning."

"A letter from your mother!" Challis's tone was puzzle, awaiting enlightenment. Judith was not to be hurried, though. For one thing, she was engaged with a beetle, who wanted either to go home or to get farther away from home. She had been heading off his successive rushes in different directions with an ungloved hand, which he always refused to crawl upon. The perseverance she gave to this seemed not altogether without its charm to her companion.

"He seems to be praying for those that despitefully use him," she said, referring to the action of his antennæ. Then, without discontinuing her amusement, she went back to the conversation. "Yes—a letter, with 'My dearest daughter' at the beginning, and

'Your affectionate mother' at the end. Do you not believe me? It's quite true—all my family do it! In fact, it was a long time before I found out that other families didn't do it, too. I can tell you this letter all through."

Then in a semi-humorous, indifferent way she gave alternately its actual wording and the upshot of some of its passages. Lady Arkroyd hoped she had been misinformed about her daughter's intentions. She was aware that she had no longer any legal control over her, and she made no appeal to anything but her good feeling. She would not comment on the character of the associates with whom her daughter would probably be brought in contact. She would limit what she had to say entirely to the underlined deep grief that Sir M. and herself would experience if their child persisted in a course which could only lead to degradation and disgrace. She then forgot her promise to say nothing against the profession, and gave a brief sketch of it founded on Hogarth's "Strolling Players." After which she wound up with an exhortation to her daughter not to break her father's underlined heart in his underlined old age. "And so on," said Judith, in placid conclusion, still continuing her persecution of the beetle. Challis's infatuation believed that all this was *parti pris*—mere bravado; and that his insight saw truly a hinterland of devoted affection to her parents, and consideration for the comfort of beetles. Such is the power of beauty!

"And that letter determined you to give up the drama?"

"Oh no!—it was only the beginning of it. I wrote in reply, saying I was sorry to give pain to such an exemplary parent as my papa—that was not the wording, only the sense—but that I had made up my mind, and was not prepared to disappoint you in order to keep up the traditions of a rather dreary respectability. I said you had written this part for me, and I had promised to play it, and that ended the matter. My ancestors had always kept their promises, and I should keep mine. I laid a good deal of stress on Sibyl." At this point the beetle got away cleverly, threatening a break in the conversation. This was not what Challis wanted.

"I don't understand," said he. "Why 'stress on Sibyl'?"

"I mean on Sibyl's being allowed to indulge all her fancies, at any cost; and to take up trade, too—a thing that our ancestors would not have tolerated for a moment. Why is the Great Idea to be capitalized with thousands? . . ."

"And Shakespeare's trade discountenanced? I see, and agree in the main. I suppose they said it wasn't a trade—the Great Idea?"

"They did. Sibyl said it was Guilds and Crafts, and Mediæval, and quite another thing. Perhaps it is; I don't know. But I'm sure '*Sibyl Arkroyd, Limited*' is neither Mediæval nor Guilds, and that's what they propose to call it."

"It sounds like six three-farthings, and pay at the desk. They can hardly be in earnest."

"Well, I don't know! People of—of condition are getting to take such curious views of things. It's nothing nowadays for a Countess to promise punctual attention to orders. Was it you told me there was a Curate who preached a Sermon on the New Atheism in its relation to Socialism? . . . No?—oh, then, it was somebody else!"

Challis suspected that Judith was talking in this way to defer telling him the upshot of the family discussion. He said nothing, and the flight of a heron filled out a lapse into silence which followed. And then Judith, who had risen from the tree-root to watch the vanishing bird, turned to Challis, and resumed:

"Shall we go on? . . . Oh, what was I talking about? Sibyl and the Great Idea. Well!—you see, the thing worked out like this: Papa had been wavering a good deal about financing the Great Idea, and Sir Spender Inglis had become very restive indeed, and was ready to jump at any excuse for backing out of his undertaking. He saw his opportunity, and pointed out—like Mr. Brownrigg—that my logic was irresistible, and that it was impossible to forbid my appearing on the boards if Sibyl was to be allowed to go behind the counter. A recent slump in Kaffirs had fostered economical impulses, I suppose. Anyhow, if I surrender the stage conditionally, my parent will keep his money in his pocket."

"Won't Sibyl Limited get it somewhere else?"

"She thinks she will, and my brother thinks so, no doubt. But will they? Perhaps you know about these things. I don't."

"I know little or nothing," said Challis. "But I understand that the chief point is settled. You won't play Estrild." There was no affectation of unconcern in his manner now.

The two walked on together along the river-brink of Trout Bend in silence; until, leaving the river, a path, winding through scattered gorse and fern, brought them in sight of the picnic party in the shade of a great beech, the vanguard of the deep woods beyond. Then Judith stopped and said: "I suppose you are angry with me?"

To which Challis replied, with vexation in his voice: "I could have forgiven you more than that." Said as a politeness this

speech would have meant, "That is a mighty small matter to forgive you for." Said with a gasp, or something like it, it meant, to Judith's ears, that she had been winding that skein—this man's life, you see!—too quickly round her finger. He might become embarrassing.

"You will find another Estrild," she said. An attempt at a laugh failed, and its failure was worse than its omission would have been.

"I shall not try," said he. And then his evil genius saw his chance, and made Alfred Challis conceive that he could, for the release of his soul, make a false fetch of what he would have liked to say, in terms of a parallel line of thought. "I care little or nothing for the play for its own sake. My interest was in your presentation of the leading part." The words were safe, so far as they went—might have been spoken to a male actor who had taken another engagement. But he could not leave it there. That Evil Genius must needs make him go on speaking, with more and more betrayal of the great share she whom he addressed had personally in his visible chagrin. Visible in the restless movement of his hand about his face. And audible in the way he crushed his words out, cut them short on their last letter, threw them behind him: "Listen to me, and believe what I say. I count the play not worth completion now. With you the life goes out of it. It has become nothing for me." Then his voice fell, and whatever it had of petulance settled down to determination. "As for what is written of the play, I tell you plainly, I shall destroy it. At least, it shall never be acted by anyone else. . . . Stop one minute, and let me finish. I have not a word or a thought of blame for you, Judith Arkroyd. It was a mad idea—the whole thing! Now I see plainly that it never could have been. Let us forget it—all!"

The face that he spoke to was none the less beautiful that its owner was frightened at his vehemence. It continued to be—to this fool of a man who had not the courage to run away from it, but who was not at liberty to love it—the face of six months ago that had been growing on him ever since. He would almost have been thankful—though he would not confess it to himself—for visible flaws in it; a squint, a twist, an artificial tooth or two betraying their extraction, or their predecessors'. A wig would have spelt salvation, as the Press puts it.

As for Judith, she was perfectly alive, by now, to the subintents of meaning woven into Challis's speech, for the easement of a feeling he could neither tell nor conceal. "Let us forget it

all!" was so overtense in emphasis, if referring only to a disappointment about a part in a play, that it scarcely left room for an equable society response. Her tone of voice had to keep at bay any hint of a meaning that might have betrayed both into a recognition of the precipice they were so close to. As might have been expected, she lost her presence of mind, and overdid it. "I can't see any occasion for hysterics about it," said she. "Of course, I am awfully sorry, and all that sort of thing. But we live in a world, after all! And I suppose one must sometimes accommodate one's views to the necessities of Society. . . . Oh dear!—these people are quite close." She referred to their near approach to the assembled tea-drinkers, some of whom, at peace with all mankind under its influence, were scattering abroad through the neighbouring woods and dingles, discussing religious education and the fighting power of nations, pigeon-shooting, and Psychical Research.

"We came away from the tree too soon," Challis said. "Can't we turn? . . ."

"Suppose we do. We can go round the coppice. . . . What was I saying? Oh—about Society! Don't you think it is so? One has to reckon with one's Social Duties. So I'm told."

"We could have thought of Society before," Challis said, rather sullenly. And then he felt brutal. "No, Judith Arkroyd, I won't say that. Forgive me! All I mean is—it was all just as true—what you say about Society—six months ago as it is now. The mistake was then."

A small thing in his speech unnerved Judith—the way he used her full name. This was the second time he had done so. It seemed to imply some new aspect of their relation—the throwing aside of some veil—the recognition of some discarded formality. She was no longer "Miss Arkroyd"; and "Judith" would have been either patronage or impertinence. In her case there was no professional name to build a half-way house to familiarity on.

She dropped her worldly tone as misplaced or useless, as she said: "I had at one time half thought I would leave you to finish the play before I cried off. But should I have done you any service? I thought not, in the end, and I wished to get it over."

He said: "It *is* over now. No harm is done. I would not have had it otherwise."

She replied: "Your work will not be lost. You will think better of it—better about destroying it, I mean. You will finish it, I hope."

"No—I think I shall probably destroy it. I hate having in-

complete manuscripts hanging about. They keep me always in doubt whether to go on with them or not."

"Then give this one the benefit of the doubt, and finish it. Come!" She tried to *leggierire* the tone of the conversation, but it was a failure—worse than a failure, by the speech that followed on its provocation.

"I can have no woman play the leading part but you. It was written for you, and I have kept you in my mind as I wrote. I . . ." And then Alfred Challis stopped dead. But his speech, had he let it all out of his heart, would have been: "I have kept you in my mind, and now you will not leave it. You have crept into its secret corners, and rise up between me and my duty at every turn. It is not for nothing that those eyes of yours have flashed through every syllable of my very commonplace blank verse, that that voice of yours has filled out my imagination of a dozen soliloquies complying with the highest canons of dramatic art, that that hand of yours has caressed undeserving tyrants and stabbed innocent persons on insufficient provocation!" It would have been all this, for he would not have been himself if he had kept back his constant sense of the ridiculous, a term in which his mind included himself as a prime factor. But he said never a word further than what we have reported. Only the last particle, "I," as good as contained all the rest.

Judith understood it all now—all that was needed—and began to find her breath and the pulsation of her heart—things one usually forgets—forcing themselves on her attention. Why need the former catch and trip, and clip or magnify her words? Could not the last keep still? Plague take human nature! To think that she, Judith Arkroyd, mistress of herself in her own conceit, should be thus upset; unable to steer her ship out of the currents of a semi-flirtation—granted, that much, Sibyl!—with a middle-aged scribbler, who meant to be bald, in a year or so!

Had Challis dared to look at her at that moment, he would have seen that she had lost colour, as she stopped beside a hawthorn with some pretence of gathering the pink may-bloom. No one gathers may without a knife, and what Judith really did was to get a passing stay, against a slight dizziness, from a hand rested on a bough in easy reach. The gathering pretence sanctioned Challis's half-dozen paces in advance. But he did not look back at her—and it was well for him, perhaps, so beautiful was she against the may-tree—nor she at him. She knew, and he knew she knew.

Both were so conscious of their mutual consciousness that they

tacitly agreed to say nothing. But there was a difference of feeling due to their positions. Challis could not live with a Tantalus cup held to his lips, and was, moreover, constantly stung with the injustice to Marianne of admission of—entertainment of—submission to love for another woman. Poor dear old Marianne, at home there by herself! So he honestly wished to fly—fly from himself if you like to put it so—from Judith, at any rate, as her beauty had become insupportable, and to his home as a haven by preference, just to live this folly down and forget it.

And as for the young woman—well!—she didn't want to lose Challis altogether. She could see no reason why a sort of affectionate friendship should not be cherished between them, not she! It was in the nature of the animal, and it may be Challis had been entirely at fault in casting the part of Estrild, whom he had certainly not portrayed as a person who would be content, like Bunthorne, with a vegetable love. It may be also that the cold-blooded faculty Sibyl objected to in her sister was part of this nature. A pleasure in disconcerting married folks' confidence in each other may belong to systems without a heart. Only, biters are sometimes bit.

Whether or not what this lady said next, after the two had walked, a little way apart, exchanging neither look nor speech, until the tea-party came again in view—for they had made the circuit of the coppice-wood—whether this had anything to do with her wish to avoid a complete separation from her literary friend or not, we cannot guess. It may have, and yet she herself may not have known it.

"Marianne has never answered my letter," she said. "You knew I had written?"

"No," he replied. "I did not. What had you to say to Marianne?"

"I wrote to beg her earnestly once more to change her mind, and pay us a visit. We do wish her to come."

"What good would it do?" His question vexed Judith. Why could he not help her at least to shut her eyes to a change in their relation each had to know of, yet to seem, in self-defence, to ignore the other's knowledge of? He evidently had no intention of doing so.

"What good?" she repeated. "What an odd way of putting it, Scroop! Why—of course—only that it would be pleasant, and that we should be glad to have her! I always feel that I should like to know her better, for my own part." Her pique at his want of tact had been a bracing stimulus, and enabled her to put their

talk more on its old footing. The subdued tone gave place to what was almost like that of those thoughtless, unembarrassed groups they were drawing so near to. How free from care everyone else does seem when one meets him out!

Of course, she threw off their late conversation—washed her hands of it—quicker than he could. But by the time they came within hearing of the nearest group, and heard the word *denominational,* and knew thereby that religious education was under discussion, Challis had shaken off the gloom or distraction that made his answer ring so false: "You are kindness itself to Marianne. I wish she were more tractable." Those were his words. They had sounded rather civil than true or heart-felt. But behind them, inexplicably, was a feeling akin to gratitude to Judith, who had somehow made it easier to his mind to go back to Marianne without a shock. Not that it would have been good form in him to acknowledge it!

In the pre-Shakespearian days of Love, did ever a King Solomon, we wonder, feel grateful to the last Hareem capture for a courtesy shown to a disused, tolerated survival of other days?

Challis was intercepted by the group of heated discutients, saturated with religious education. Judith passed on without looking at him, merely referring to the abstract truth, "There is tea," and leaving his teawardness to develope itself at leisure, or die of neglect. The huge boarhound left a sweet biscuit to meet her, and after exchanging a few words and a kiss, made believe that he had found her in the wilderness, and brought her in safety to refreshments, which it was distinctly understood that he was to share.

The conclave on religious education, like Polly's employers after Sukey had taken the kettle off again—presumably—had all had tea, and were horridly indifferent about anyone else going without.

They were confident they might rely on Mr. Challis's impartiality to distinguish between things that to the casual observer might seem identical; to assign due weight to considerations which the superficial observer would overlook; and to sift and examine evidence which the prejudiced observer would be only too prone to reject.

Mr. Challis, appealed to to give an impromptu casting-vote on a variety of subjects, felt impartial and flattered. He could only contribute, he said, an absolute freedom from bias on the question of religious education. He regretted his total absence of information, the possession of which, in however small a degree, al-

ways adds weight to the decisions of the most unbiassed judgment. However, it soon became clear that all that was asked of him was that he should listen impartially to all three disputants, and hold his tongue *sine die* while they talked sixteen to the dozen. As he was not in a humour for talking, he had no objection to this.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BRITISH HOUSEKEEPER. HOW MRS. ELDRIDGE CAME INSTEAD OF TO-MORROW. HER ADVICE. TELEGRAPH GIRLS. A FRENCHWOMAN'S IDEAS. HOW THE CAT GOT NO SLEEP. HOW MARIANNE POSTED A CIVIL SORT OF LETTER IN THE PILLAR-BOX, AND WAS SORRY

In the absence of Master Bob at Rugby, and of his father with those Royd people in the country, Mrs. Challis had a quiet time in the Hermitage. She was able to keep housekeeping at bay by ordering in a joint for the family to prey on slowly for three days or thereabouts; after which Mrs. Steptoe had to help her to think of what to have in. Marianne sat still and bit a pen-stick, while Mrs. Steptoe remarked at intervals, "You see, as I say, ma'am, it isn't as if there was anything in the house."

When Aunt Stingy had done this two or three times, her mistress indicated the nature of the problem to be dealt with; saying, as a contented giraffe might have done, "I don't want another neck."

Mrs. Steptoe advanced a cautious suggestion: "You don't take to liver, ma'am?" Mrs. Challis did *not*; that was flat! But a piece for the kitchen was a different thing. Just as you liked! Mrs. Steptoe said in a soothing manner, "A nice little bit of liver!" and that was settled.

Should anyone not accustomed to these islands ask why the question of one day's rations should be approached as though it had been raised for the first time in the history of mankind, no answer can be given in the present state of human knowledge. All that can be said is that an equivalent interview is going on in most households of the natives every other morning, or thereabouts.

In time stimulated perspicuity saw a light. Shrewd discriminative subtlety was on Aunt Stingy's face as she said, "Why not the fowl to-day, ma'am, and stand the joint over for a day or two? Because in this briling weather it is that liable to smell faint!" Marianne cogitated deeply, turning the pencil in her mouth; then said, "If we were to have Mrs. Eldridge to-day instead of to-morrow. . . . It doesn't matter which, because Mr.

Eldridge won't be back till Wednesday." This will not bear close analysis; but Marianne was not pricking pins at a tissue, and all purposes were answered. When the children went out for their walk, they brought back word that Mrs. Eldridge would "come instead of to-morrow." And that is how on this particular Monday evening these two ladies are agreeing that this coffee is too strong, and there's no hot water, and the more florid one of the two is saying that she must speak to Steptoe about it.

The heat of the weather tells differently on them, which has to do with our epithet for Marianne's complexion. Charlotte's look is rather sallower than usual, as she leans back fanning the full lids of her half-closed eyes. She is not bad-looking, certainly—must have been very graceful when she was a girl.

The coffee-incident must have interrupted a conversation, for the sound of resumption is in Charlotte's remark as she sips it. "I should write" is what she says.

"Which to? Him or her?"

"Her. No!—him. I should write to him."

"Which do you mean?"

"Him."

"I don't know what to say."

"What you've been saying to me just now."

"Nonsense, Charlotte! How can you talk such stuff?"

"Well!—I *should*." After which neither lady spoke for awhile, but seemed to be thinking over points raised. Marianne uneasily, and even with an occasional impatient jerk, resented as selfish by a cat asleep on her knees; Charlotte introspectively, but as one enjoying some internal satisfaction.

Presently Marianne spoke, looking curiously at her friend, as though she suspected this concealed something. "I wish you would say plainly what you mean, Charlotte," she said.

Charlotte answered evasively. "It doesn't the least follow that what I should do you ought to do." She had on Marianne the sort of effect the ringed snake is said to have on the oriole—was sure her victim would jump down her throat if she bided her time. And if Marianne did this of her own accord, she herself would clearly be free from all complicities. For there was nothing Charlotte was so clear about in theory as that she did not wish to mix herself up in the affair; or any affair, for that matter. It was curious how frequently she found herself abstaining from getting mixed up. In this case, even when Marianne said point-blank, "But what *would* you do?" she still replied, "Never mind, dear! What can it matter what I should or shouldn't do?"

"Charlotte, you're unkind! At least, you're not friendly. You go in and out. First it's one thing, and then it's another. Suppose you were me, what would you do? Write to this girl, and just refuse the invitation?"

After all, Charlotte was not so very clear about what she would write. "N—no, dear!" she said. "I don't think I should write to *her*. I should send her a message, through him. All civility, don't you know? Couldn't leave home at present. Hope some other time. So nice of her to ask you! Best thanks. Kindest regards. That sort of thing. But writing to *my* husband, you know—the rule mightn't hold good for yours; I quite see that—I shouldn't mince matters."

"What *does* 'not mincing matters' mean? I think you might speak plain, Charlotte. Can't you *say* what you mean?" She puts her hand up to her head restlessly, causing her friend to ask, "Headache?" To which she replies impatiently, "*Not* headache!" and takes it down. Charlotte then resumes, with much implication that the use of her husband as a lay-figure franks her of responsibility.

"I should tell *him* plainly that if he wanted to make love to fashionable young women he might go his own way, and I could do without him perfectly well. I should let him know he's not the treasure he fancies he is."

Marianne looked unconvinced, incredulous. "Suppose he took you at your word, Charlotte!" said she.

Charlotte laughed out scornfully. "My dear woman," she said, "John's a born fool, I know. But he's not such a fool as that! He knows what he's like well enough to know that this sort of young woman is not the sort to give me a case."

"Give you a case?"

"Stupid girl!—don't you see? A case for divorce. It's plain enough to anyone who isn't a downright fool. A telegraph-girl would be quite another pair of shoes."

"I suppose I don't understand these things."

"Now, my dear Marianne, do you mean to say that if you heard that your Titus had been lunching at Jules's with Lady Thingammy What's-her-name, it wouldn't be quite different from a telegraph-girl and an ABC?" Marianne said she couldn't see any difference. But this was only her obstinacy. Charlotte continued: "Well, *I* should! And so would the jury. Why, I know by this—that if it was Jules's I shouldn't lose a wink of sleep about it; but if it was a telegraph-girl, I wouldn't go to Clacton-on-Sea in August and leave John alone in London. Not with my

ideas, which are rather strict. Of course, one isn't a Frenchwoman or an Italian."

"What are *their* ideas? How should *I* know anything about them?"

"Do you want me to tell you anything about them, or not? That's the question. . . . Well, of course, one knows what a Frenchwoman's ideas are, and I suppose Italians are exactly the same." Strange to say, this shadowy suggestion in a dropped voice, to fend off the dangers of empty space, seems to convey a distinct impression to its hearer, for she says, "Suppose they are, what then?" and the reply is, "Well—I suppose you wouldn't want us to do as they do! Would you?"

Mrs. John Eldridge possessed in the very highest degree the faculty of making it understood, by slight inflections and modulations of voice, by pauses in the right place, by gestures the shrewdest eyesight could not swear to, though the dullest could never remain in ignorance of them, that a lady and gentleman were engaging her attention. She had manipulated the subject in hand by a dexterous introduction of the Latin races, who are notoriously immoral, until a halo of profligacy had encircled her friend's husband and his aristocratic acquaintance. Marianne kicked in her soul against all suggestions of the kind, but with a misgiving that her friend knew more about "this sort of thing" than she herself did. This, too, she strove to keep under, not to allow Titus, whom she believed incapable of the part Charlotte's management would have assigned to him, to be attired for it in the cast-off garments of some reprobate of the Parisian stage.

"I can't see what the ways of French people have to do with the matter. When I said what I did just now I wasn't thinking of that sort of thing."

"Then, dear, perhaps you'll tell me what you *were* thinking of. Because I can't make out, for the life of me." This came rather coldly from Charlotte.

"It's very simple. I meant that if Titus is tired of me, I had just as soon that he should go away to someone else. And so I would—just as soon. S-s-sooner!" If Marianne had stopped on the penultimate word, there might have been no breakdown. But it came, with the intensification of her courageous little falsehood; came in the stereotyped course one knows so well—first, the failure of the lips to be still, then the quickened breath, and then the final irrepressible tears. Then the beseeching to be left alone —only just for one minute! . . . all will be right in a minute, only don't speak to me, please! Go on talking!

"There!—I've been a fool, and I'm sorry." As she said this, Mrs. Challis returned to her pocket a handkerchief that had dried her tears, certainly, but had finished by taking a very unpoetical part in the transaction. The cat, bored by her demonstrativeness, had left her lap for a short stretch on the rug, and now returned with returning quiet.

Mrs. Eldridge took a base advantage. "No, dear!—you're very, very brave about it. I know just what I should feel myself. Any woman would feel exactly as you do. . . . Oh no, dear!—of course we both thoroughly understand. There's nothing really wrong, and nobody is to be suspected of anything."

"You don't see what—I—mean!" said Marianne. "You never have, Charlotte. But it ought to be simple enough. You don't suppose I think Titus isn't to be trusted away from my apron-strings after all the years I've known him."

"*I* don't know, dear. Don't ask me! Men are men. However, if you *can* trust him, I don't see what you want."

"I can want a great deal, and I do. I want him not to care about other people more than his own home."

"You want him not to care so much about this girl? Isn't that it?"

"In a certain sense, *yes!*"

"Very well, dear. Perhaps if there are more senses than one in the business, you'll tell me what they are. According to me, a man either cares for a girl, or he doesn't. I can't see any half-way."

"I can see heaps of half-ways. What I mean is, when he takes more pleasure in her society than he does in . . ."

"In his wife's? I don't see that we don't mean the same thing, so far."

"Then I don't mean that at all, but something else. What *is* the use of talking if you always twist what I say round?" Marianne is like a witness in the hands of a clever counsel, but with an advantage. If the witness resorts to the use of a bludgeon against the legal rapier, the Court interposes to protect his assailant. There was no Court in Marianne's case.

Charlotte retreated into the entrenchments of forbearance. "I don't want to quarrel, dear!" she said. "Suppose you write the letter!"

"To her?"

"To him. Do it now! You may just as well." None the less, Charlotte was surprised—only she didn't show it—when Marianne shook off the re-established cat, and rose to go to the writing-table. The cat, this time disgusted beyond words, stretched her-

self, and weighed the comforts of divers corners available. Mrs. Eldridge could have afforded one, but decided that cats were too hot in this weather. So Pussy had to be content with an angle in sofa-cushions.

The long-expiring light of the summer evening had been good to talk by, but enough of it was not left for letter-writing. Nevertheless, Mrs. Challis wouldn't ring for the lamp. Candles would do, she said. And having lighted them, she sat down to write.

A fly had perished in the ink since it was last used, and had to be coaxed out gradually, legs having got left behind by the first drags employed. Also, the pens—so described—consisted of a single example, which was a very long pen with diabolical corrugations at its shoulder, and a terrible sharp point. It refused to write on any terms, and on examination was proved to consist of one widowed nib, a source of despair to the scribe. There were no other pens; at least, Harmood had put them somewhere. Never mind!—there was a fountain-pen that did perfectly if you dipped it in the ink. It was really a lot better that way, because then you didn't inky your fingers all over. The experience of many among us is that *escritoires* are strewn with writing materials of these sorts, especially the last.

However, there was no doubt of the fountain-pen, once its haughty spirit could be curbed and induced to submit to the position of a mere agent. And the sounds of writing come presently from the writing-table, mixed with the curses of its occupant, who presently discovers that she has been writing on a sheet with a "limerick" on the back.

"Never mind. Let's see how far you've written." Mrs. Eldridge stretches her fingers out to receive the letter without taking her eyes off a paragraph she is reading in a *Daily Mail*. She holds the letter till she has finished, then reads it, and gives an immediate verdict. "You can't send *that*," she says.

"And why not?" asks Marianne, a little nettled at this rather cavalier treatment of her effort. But she knows she has not the courage to rebel, not having a particle of faith in her powers of composition.

"You can't say, 'Your Miss Arkroyd has written to me, and I won't come, and you know perfectly well why.'"

"Why not?"

"My dear! . . . However, do if you like."

"Well, then—I *shall*." This was mere bluster, of which Charlotte took no notice.

"And you can't say: 'You know I am not wanted, and both

of you will be wishing me somewhere else all the while.' Simply impossible!"

"I cannot see the impossibility. Titus would be in a panic about what I should say next. I hate their rooms, full of people. They always make me nervous."

Charlotte sees that interpretation down to her companion's level is necessary. "Rooms-full have nothing to do with it," she says. "He will think you meant you would be *de trop*."

"Well, and what does that mean?"

Charlotte coughed explanatorily. "It is only used under circumstances of three," she says, not without obscurity. And then adds, as a full light on the subject: "One has to go."

"Same as 'two's company and three's none,' I suppose? But why French?"

"It means more. There are niceties." And this lady seems to keep back a suggestion that these niceties are beyond her friend's range of French. She goes on with a roused attention, having glanced farther on as she spoke last, absently. "And, my dear, look here! You can't possibly send this: 'Why can't we agree each to go our own way? Lots of people don't go about everywhere in couples.' You can't send that!"

"Well, Charlotte, I *shall* send that, and I think you're ridiculous. Why shouldn't I send it when I mean it? If Titus would only not worry about, and think it his duty to say things, these people wouldn't want me. Why should they? And then perhaps we should have an end of complaining about Steptoe's gravy. I'm simply sick of it all." And Mrs. Challis taps with her foot, and shows a feverish irritability.

Charlotte keeps well on her higher level. "My dear Marianne, you are the most unworldly baby! Don't you see the interpretation that might be put—I don't say your Titus *would* put it, but he *might*—on 'Why can't we agree, et cetera?' If I were to say such a thing to John, it would be a telegraph-girl directly."

Marianne flushes angrily. "Charlotte! How often have I said to you that I hate you when you draw comparisons between Titus and your John! It might be fifty telegraph-girls with him, but I know Titus well enough to know . . ."

"Oh!" A slight interjection, but it checks Marianne half-way.

"At any rate, he has never deceived me about anything of this sort." The flush is vanishing.

"Not *exactly* of *this* sort—no!" Now, Charlotte had been watching her opportunity to say this, having noted that the effect produced by Mrs. Steptoe's story had been falling into

abeyance, owing to the subsidence of a policy of pin-pricks between Mr. and Mrs. Challis, in view of his pending visit to Royd, and still more in consequence of a sufficiently affectionate farewell at his departure. Marianne had in fact been gradually minimising the incident, and was on her way towards asking Titus straightforwardly for an explanation, as, of course, she ought to have done at first.

It is quite possible Mrs. Eldridge might have kept this card up her sleeve if Marianne had not nettled her by the way she spoke of her John. She may have provoked it; but did that matter? She was not going to let anyone else pelt him. Anyhow, she played the card, and, glancing up at Marianne, had reason to be satisfied with the effect it had produced.

Marianne may have known she looked white, and wished for darkness to hide it, for she blew both candles out, and returned to her seat with her back to the window. The cat sighed, as lamenting the selfishness of mortals, and resumed her old place, now again available, with a pretence of magnanimity.

"I shall copy that letter on a clean sheet, and send it." The darkness seemed to give the speaker fortitude.

"Go your own way, dear! I've done my best." Mrs. Eldridge claimed freedom from responsibility.

"You know, I suppose, that I spoke to mamma about that Steptoe nonsense—the photograph?"

"No, I didn't. What did she say?"

"Said it was all sheer impossibility. Said Steptoe had been turning the cupboards over when we were away at Easter, and cooked it all up."

"That won't do us any good. How did Steptoe know the name of the coal-merchant?"

"Saw it on the back of the photo, mamma says."

"And how did she know the name Verrall?"

"Because it's Bob's second name. Besides, it's on a brass plate on Kate's old portmanteau in the trunk-room."

"I can't say I think that accounts for anything." Mrs. Eldridge pointed out two or three weak points in Mrs. Craik's explanation, and condemned it as worthless. She was wrong. The explanation was a good one *per se*, but, like so many explanations, taxed human powers of belief more than the thing it explained. However, no one who has the faculty of selecting his creeds ever stickles about the trouble one will give him. He only thinks of the advantages it will bring with it.

"Perhaps it doesn't explain. That's what mamma said, any-

how." Thus Marianne, as if it didn't matter much, either way. Then, more convincedly: "I don't believe Steptoe is lying, because I can't see what she has to gain by it. Besides, I pulled the photo out of the *passe-partout,* and it was gummed in, and the name on the back."

"Did you say so to your mother?"

"Yes, and she said I must have been mistaken, because, if not, the story would have been true."

"I can't see"—Mrs. Eldridge is talking reflectively, introspectively—"I cannot see *why* your husband did not tell you all about it! Suppose your sister *was* married to this man first, I don't see that it was any such hanging matter. Unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Well!—nothing, dear. That is, perhaps I oughtn't to say . . ."

"Charlotte!—that's you all over! You know you're wanting to say all the time. *Do speak out and have done with it!*" Marianne got up uneasily, and walked from place to place in the room. The cat went back to the sofa cushion, and resumed her task of getting a little sleep.

Charlotte means to say, in time. Trust her! "You know, dear Marianne, that all this is the *merest* speculation. We really know *nothing!* And ten to one, when you do speak of it to Titus, he'll be able to clear it all up. Besides, after all, it could only be the sort of thing that's always happening, and one says nothing about it as long as the parties get married afterwards. . . ."

Marianne interrupts stormily. "Will you have the goodness, Charlotte, to tell me what you mean, and not beat about the bush? You can't mean that poor Kate . . ."

"I can't tell you anything, dear, if you get so excited (Your hair's coming undone. A pin?—here's one.) Remember, I'm only mentioning this as *one* of the possibilities, and I don't suppose it's true. But if it were ever so true, I don't see that it would be anything to fly out about. After all these years! . . . Will I tell you what I mean? Yes, dear, if you'll be quiet and listen."

"Will you *go on?*"

Mrs. Eldridge braces herself up to consecutive narrative, as in response to unreasonable impatience. "There was a marriage. That's understood—I mean your sister's with her first husband. And it was kept dark. . . ."

"I wish you wouldn't talk as if it was the Criminal Classes. Go on!"

"I can't if you interrupt. Well!—Mr. Challis was quite a

young man then, and a friend of the first husband's, and she was young. You see?"

"I see their youngness would make it all the worse, instead of better. If it was true! But it isn't." At this point Marianne gives up the attempt to engineer the hairpin. "Can't you stop stopping, Charlotte, and go *on?*"

Charlotte deserts the extreme of deliberation for irritating rapidity and conciseness. "The first husband may have been anything, for anything we know of him. Only, there must have been a reason for their parting, if you think of it. Within a few months! Now suppose—don't be in a rage, Marianne dear, it doesn't do any good!—suppose your husband *was* the reason! Of course, he would never tell you, if Kate never did. . . ."

"I was a child!"

"I don't think anything of that. Children are easier to tell than half-grown-up people. Remember, too, as time went on, how much harder it would get to tell. Fancy his beginning to speak of it! How would he? Come, Marianne!" And Marianne's silence admitted that she felt the difficulty her husband would have had in publishing for private circulation an early transgression of his own—and Bob's mother, please! It may all have been, and yet Titus may have done rightly to let bygones be bygones. That was her thought at the moment, but it jumped gladly at leave to go when further speech of Charlotte's brought a respite: "Of course, *the* obstacle to accounting for it this way is the divorce. It seems impossible there should have been a divorce, and your mother never heard of it!"

"Why, of course, Charlotte! What nonsense it all is!" Marianne is greatly relieved. But we must not halloa before we are out of the wood. Charlotte had a reservation:

"Only there's just one thing—I'm afraid I must shock you, Marianne; only, mind you, I don't believe for a moment that it's true—just one thing, and that is . . . yes!—I'm going on . . . that is, that there may have been *no need for a divorce.* You see?"

She doesn't, evidently. For, after a moment's consideration, she says: "If there was no need for a divorce, why drag Titus in? What nonsense, Charlotte!" She is breathing freely over it—too freely.

"No, dear—not that way! You don't understand." A pause to get a clear start. "Your sister Kate and this man were *supposed* to be lawfully married. At least, the coal-merchant and his wife must have thought so. But suppose they were *not!* Don't you see, dear"—this very gently, not to tax her hearer overmuch—"don't you see that *then* no divorce would have been necessary?"

"You puzzle me so, Charlotte! Do stop and let me think. Say it again." She opened to the full a window partly raised for the heat, and found the sweet air from the Common grateful. For her head had become hot, and her lips were dry.

Charlotte followed her last instruction, by choice. "Try to imagine, dear, for instance, that your sister had been entrapped into a false marriage by this man, and that he discarded her because he was jealous of your husband. You know if he had grounds for his jealousy your husband might be bound in honour to keep silence—especially to her own sister. And then consider! —they *were* married afterwards."

It was beginning to dawn on Mrs. Challis that in the little drama her friend's imagination had constructed her husband figured as a licentious youth, a traitor to his friend; and a dissimulator, when he was posing at her mother's house as an honourable suitor to her sister, his only redeeming feature being his constancy to the girl of whose second betrayal he was the guilty author. While, as for that young woman herself! . . . Marianne's whole soul recoiled from the semblance of an indiscriminate *liaison*-monger with which Charlotte had not scrupled to clothe her. The intrinsic impossibility of associating such an image with her sister made her feel as though she really disposed of the whole question when she said, with perfect *naïveté*, "But this was Kate!"

How perfectly clear and exhaustive! That was Kate—or would have been had there been any truth in the tale—and Kate was her grown-up sister in the early days when her father was living, and they were a household. That was our Kate that was just thinking about being a young lady when she herself, Marianne, was just beginning to take intelligent notes of her surroundings—our Kate that knew how to play the piano and had a governess—our Kate that became one herself in a modest way when father died, and it turned out that Uncle Barker had invested her mother's settlement money in himself, contrary to the behests of the Lord Chancellor. How in Heaven's name could a thing one knew as a girl, unlengthened, become an immoral, unprincipled woman, like in books and newspaper-paragraphs! Absurd!

And yet—may not this be a question as hard for us to answer as poor, slow, middle-class, muddle-headed Marianne? Look at it from the other side! How many reprobates, dashing and otherwise, may there not be who began good and sweet, and kept so till they became bad and putrid—can even look back, from the gutter their last stage of decay is on the watch to defile, on a spell of

blameless maturity? That ill-complexioned thing that thought it was singing as it reeled from the pothouse door but now, was once —maybe—a savoury little maid enough, with a sweetheart. What if he saw her at this moment?—saw the passers-by shrink from her and leave her a clear pavement?—heard the mock approval of London humour, seasoned to the shameful sight, and unashamed, "Go it, old Sairah"?

The story disclaims imputing all these thoughts to Marianne, or any of them. But the sum and gist of them came out—just as clearly, maybe more so—in those four words, "But this was Kate."

She turned from the window and looked her friend full in the face, in return for "What if it was?"—which was the answer she got. She felt angry with Charlotte, who, for all her profession of belief that her surmises were probably baseless, seemed to be always supporting the one that ascribed most lawlessness to her husband and sister.

"What if it was?" said she. "Everything if it was." She couldn't argue to save her life. But she dealt with dialectical difficulties in a method of her own that was quite as effectual. This time it told forcibly.

"Don't blaze out at me like that, Marianne," said the enemy. "*I* can't help it. I suppose everyone was somebody's Kate once —even Jezebel and Judas Iscariot!" The selection sounded trenchant, and no Biblical critic was at hand. "Besides, as I said, it wasn't a hanging matter, at the worst."

"I thought you said you were strict, Charlotte."

"So I am. But this sort of thing *does* take place, and one knows it, and I don't see the use of going on nagging for ever." Marianne's religious feelings prompted her towards pointing out that the Almighty might not subscribe to this view, but she was not quick enough. Charlotte continued: "And how a girl who knows nothing can know if a ceremony's done correctly is more than I can tell. Look at vaccination—all the little ivories exactly alike! Why, you may be vaccinated from a mad bull and never be a penny the wiser!"

Any metaphor or analogy makes Marianne's head go round, and she still keeps silence. Charlotte ends with consolation: "And when you come to think of it, if they weren't correctly married, it was all to the good."

"What on earth you mean; Charlotte, I cannot imagine!"

"Well, dear!—I should have thought anyone would spot that at once. Even John saw that! Of course, if the first marriage

was irregular, there *was* no breach of the Seventh Commandment." Marianne felt a distinct relief from one of the nightmare apprehensions about her husband's past that Charlotte's ingenious speculations had aroused. She and her friend shared with a large section of the respectable World, strict and otherwise, the idea that trespassers who jump over a wedding-ring fence should be prosecuted, while poachers on unenclosed property may escape with a caution.

But her mind was not capable of more than one idea at a time, and in dwelling on this remission of the imputations against him, she quite forgot that the theory of a victimization of Kate by her first husband, if it did not acquit him of any indiscretion towards her sister, at any rate altered all the circumstances under which the indictment was framed. If there was no divorce, why select a co-respondent? Marianne just missed the important point. Out of the chaotic cross-questionings of the mystery she emerged with one false fixed idea, that her husband's reason for concealing the story *must have been* his desire to draw a veil over that Brighton period before his pretended courtship and marriage. Mrs. Eldridge encouraged this idea.

"I hope you see now, dear, what I mean about the letter," said she, after some more talk, embodying the foregoing, more or less. She pulled the letter from under the cat, who had lain down on it, and read again: "'You know I am not wanted, and both of you will be wishing me somewhere else all the while.' I'm sure I'm right in saying you can't send that. If it was all innocence and Paul and Virginia and Jenny and Jessamy and Arcadian shepherds, I dare say! But, with that story not cleared up! My dear Marianne, *do* be a little a woman of the World. . . . Isn't that my cab?"

Marianne said drearily: "I think so. They'll tell us." Because, although Mrs. Eldridge made things worse for her every time she spoke, she clung to her as the only person in her confidence—for she restrained her communications to her mother—and as one for whose knowledge of the mysterious thing called "the World" she had always had a superstitious reverence. So, when Harmood announced the advent of the cab—in cypher, as it were; for she merely said, "Adcock, for Mrs. Eldridge, ma'am"—she was sorry.

"It *is* Adcock," said Mrs. Eldridge; and Harmood would bring her things down to save her going upstairs, and did so. During Harmood's absence the conversation could be rounded off and wound up.

"Am I to send the letter or not?" said Marianne. This was concession, for had she not flounced her intention of sending it in Mrs. Eldridge's face half-an-hour ago?

"Do as you like, dear! But I hope you won't. That's all I can say. Now good-night!" Charlotte's lips are extended as towards a farewell kiss; her hands tell well, anticipating embrace, and all her suggestions are graceful—as a lady's may be, who terminates musically in skirts.

But Marianne wants a straight tip for that letter.

"What am I to say, then?" says she doggedly. "I *must* write."

"Say what I told you, dear! So sorry—too much wanted at home to be able to come away just now—hope to see Miss Arkroyd . . . or Judith, if you call her Judith . . . in town before she goes away for good. Just a civil-letter sort of business! Don't you see how much better it will be yourself?" Harmood has come again, and is tendering a shroud from behind. Two hands accept it gracefully over each shoulder, and it abets the music of the skirts.

"I suppose it will," says Marianne doubtfully, and they go out to where Mr. Adcock awaits them. And then either of them who desires to do so may study the relations to one another of a very civil man with a flavour you would pronounce beer if encouraged by an expert; a four-wheeler he has to bang the door of—*you* are no good!—or it wouldn't shut; a horse that wants to be at home, and a summer moon doing its level best to make some birch-trees down the road look like silver. It is overhead, and you have to crane your neck to look at it.

Mrs. Challis did so, but saw nothing in it to make her eyes and lips less dry and hot. She returned to the drawing-room, and told Harmood not to shut the shutters; she would herself ultimately. Whereupon Harmood asked whether she would like anything. And being told she would like nothing else, thank you! said good-night, and was soon after audible passing upstairs with the plate, and not being absolutely cordial with Mrs. Steptoe.

Did Charlotte know how miserable she was making her? So thought the poor lady to herself as she looked out at the persevering moon. She felt feverish—and revengeful. Not with Charlotte, of course; a little aggravated, perhaps—that was all! But this girl—this Judith, with her insolent beauty and her knowledge of its power! This anxiety that she should go to Royd—what was it worth? Was she asked because it was so clear the invitation would never be accepted, or because she was wanted to cover the

position? One or the other, or something like it—no good or honourable motive! . . . Oh no!—nothing dishonourable, of course, in that sense—so Marianne reasoned with herself—but there were distinctions of honour and dishonour in higher strata of morality, above the gutter-ethics Charlotte would always be harping on. And yet!—suppose there had been any truth in that Steptoe legend, with the worst interpretations on it, might not Titus have concealed another self all along? He had concealed something: that she knew. Why not many things? Why not everything?

The condemned letter was not altogether judicious, but its very errors of judgment might have led to plain speech, recrimination, a storm, and a reconciliation. Anything would have been better, as the result showed, than an ill constructed epistle Marianne wrote in the end, a message for her husband to pass on to Miss Arkroyd much on the lines Charlotte had suggested. Too many words for a message, too few for a letter from any wife to a husband under circumstances where brevity might be ascribed to pique. In which, too, she could not bring herself to the point of saying she hoped to see Miss Arkroyd, either in town or elsewhere, because she didn't. She hated Judith, but would not confess the reason to herself. So the letter worked out as nothing but a cold and civil message, refusing a very cordially written invitation. And it was all the worse that it contained a few lines in answer to Titus's last—not an unaffectionate epistle, written promptly on the evening of his arrival. But Marianne was a truthful person when her back was up, and wasn't going to tell any lies when candour tasted sweet in her mouth. So she indulged in a word or two of postscript on the back of the letter, and didn't quite like it when re-read. But really the text was just as bad without it. Look at the chilly "My dear Alfred," and "yr: aff: wife"! She fought off her vacillation, helped by a glance at Judith's letter and an allusion to her "dear husband"; closed the envelope, directed and stamped it, feeling determined, while she knew under the skin that she was wrong, and showing a proper spirit.

Then, possessed by her evil genius, she must needs go downstairs, undo the front door and walk out in the sweet moonlight to the red pillar-box only a few paces off, that was so convenient. Then, when she had heard the letter fall to the bottom of the empty box, past hope, past help, past cure, she was sorry. Then she called herself a coward and went back to bed. But she felt like a criminal as she pushed open the door she had left unhasped.

What a many miscarriages proper spirits have to answer for!

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW CHALLIS MET LIZARANN IN SOCIETY. OF A LECTURE THE RECTOR READ CHALLIS, AND ITS EFFECT ON HIS IMAGE OF MARIANNE. HOW HE HADN'T BEEN TO ASHCROFT. IT WAS AN UNSATISFACTORY LETTER THAT!

THE persistent self-absorption and stunning monotonous clatter of one's fellow-creatures, however execrable it may seem when one wants to predominate over them by the legitimate employment of one's superior gifts—without shouting, you know!—may be not unwelcome when one longs for an excuse for silence, as Challis did after that unsettling interview with Judith—silence, and a little time to think things over before any further speech with the source of his disquiet. The more row other people were making, the better! This feeling was quite consistent with susceptibility to a magnetism which needed some device to veil its nature. He would call it tea, for the nonce, anyhow. He made tea the pretext to escape from his position of arbiter without rights of speech, and left the disputants, promising to return forthwith, and meaning to break his promise.

He made the most of the hundred yards to the tea-camp, nodding remotely to casuals by the way. He looked for an excuse to avoid joining the group at headquarters, who appeared at his distance off to be discoursing brilliantly, interestedly, on absorbing topics, with smiles. He knew they were talking nonsense about nothing particular, and was glad to find his excuse in Athelstan Taylor and his sister-in-law, who had joined the party, bringing with them their own little girls and the small cockney waif in blue, whose aunt was Mrs. Steptoe. That was how our Lizarann presented herself to Mr. Challis.

"I like you better than your aunt," said that gentleman candidly, when Lizarann was introduced.

"So do I," replied Lizarann. But this answer, clear as its meaning was to all sympathetic souls, was taken exception to by the Rector's sister-in-law.

"What can the unintelligible child mean by that?" said she. "Because you *are* unintelligible, you know you are, Lizarann!"

"Yass, please!" said Lizarann. And then she felt when people laughed that she was being treated like a child, which at her age was absurd.

Miss Caldecott, the sister-in-law, was one of those tiresome people who are always forming grown-up Leagues against children, and making it distinctly understood that these leagues, though ready to stoop to the level of children's understanding, do so under protest, and with reservations as to their own superiority. Miss Caldecott paraded hers, greatly to Lizarann's umbrage, in the tone in which she said, "We do not yet know, my dear, that Mr. Challis has an aunt"; into which tone she contrived to infuse a suggestion of respect for Challis's family, even if the previous generations consisted only of the direct line.

Challis refused to be taken into the League. To avoid it he stated that he had more aunts than was really the case. He went further, and ascribed to one of them attributes that have surely never belonged to any person's aunt. She had, he said, a front, and lived on tea-leaves, which came out on her person as a kind of stiff black net which he had the impudence to say he believed was never removed at night.

Lizarann recalled a like experience which she thought would bear repetition.

"Bridgetticks," she said, in a loud, outspoken way that commanded an audience, "she's a hunkle comes out a Sundays and Schristmas Day, and gold trimmings to his coat, and brarse buttons, and Bridgetticks, she could count up eight and two behind."

"You must try to say 'uncle,' my dear, not 'hunkle,'" said Miss Caldecott, which Lizarann did, meekly, with an impression that perhaps she had claimed too much for Old Shakey, which was the old man's bye-name in Tallack Street, where he appeared at intervals. She had used the "h" to give an adventitious force of character to the tremulous relic of better days she was referring to. She wished him to be thought of as resolute, without presenting him in the aspect of a swashbuckler.

"What do you make of *him,* Rector?" asked Challis.

"I know all about him. At least, Gus knows." Athelstan Taylor had appropriated a camp stool, that he might accommodate Lizarann and his younger daughter on his knees. He looked round at his sister-in-law. "Don't you remember, my dear? Gus told us about him. A sort of old pensioner chap!"

Miss Caldecott remembered him, primly. "Not very sober, I fear!" said she.

Lizarann joined in the conversation. "Wunst you get him in-

side of the bust," she said, "the sconductor keeps his eye upon him. Yass!—All the way to Stockwell." Lizarann's confidence that her hearers knew the world had something very pretty and touching about it.

But Miss Caldecott, as the exponent of the League—which no one had asked her to form—checkmated Bridgetticks's relative. "We won't talk any more about him now, my dear," she said. The smallest shade passed over the Rector's face. However, it didn't matter for him. He could tickle Lizarann slightly, thanks to his position of vantage, and thus avoid being misunderstood.

With Challis it was otherwise. The effect upon his mind of the action of the League was that he now felt that Bridget's disreputable uncle was absolutely the only topic of conversation possible. He tried in vain to remember that anything else existed in the Universe.

"Mayn't we hear more about Miss Hicks's family?" said he, with some sense of proposing a compromise—not to run counter to the feeling of the League, as it were. Miss Caldecott said something confidentially to Space about not encouraging the child to much.

But she did not understand the earnestness and good faith of the said child. Lizarann had no suspicion that the gentleman's anxiety to know about her friend's connection was sheer affectation, and hastened to supply particulars. She proceeded to sketch the Hicks family, laying stress as much as possible on the excellence of its motives and the sobriety of its demeanour.

"Bridgetticks," she said, "she spinched her finger in the jam of the door, and felt it a week after in her shoulder-j'int. Yass—she *did!* And Mr. 'Icks, he don't take nothing till after gone twelve o'clock, and then mostly at meals. And Mrs. 'Icks, she never touches anything. Only then she never has scarcely no rheumatic pains to speak of."

"You see that point, Challis?" said the Rector parenthetically, in a quick undertone, over the heads of the two young ladies. "What Mr. 'Icks does touch is part of a course of treatment for rheumatism." Challis nodded the completeness of his understanding, and then the little girl Phœbe, who was listening with gravity, leaning on the shoulder of her father, said, "And then say why!"

Lizarann, prompted, continued, "Yass—she hasn't! Because of the nature of the suds. Because she's over her elbers all day, and can't roll nothin' up high enough, not to keep dry. And Dr. Ferris, he puts it down to the lump soda." An inquiring look of

Challis's produced the additional information. "Yass!—you can buy it at the oilshop just acrost the road from the Robin Hood. Only it comes to less by the quarter-hundredweight." All this did the greatest credit to Lizarann's power of storing information.

But the League had been tolerating this sort of thing too long, and its Secretary or Solicitor—whichever Miss Caldecott was—struck in with, "Perhaps we've talked *qui-ite* enough now about Bridget Hicks and her family, my dear! We mustn't trespass too much on Mr. Challis's good-nature." Suspicion of the sinister intentions of the League gleamed in Lizarann's eye; for she disbelieved in its representative, while admitting her goodness. She might have ignored her intrusion if it had not been that the extraordinary sensitiveness of childhood to impressions that never penetrate the thick hide of manhood made her detect in Challis's disclaimer an understanding between himself and the League—one that civility had dictated reference to on his part, but that he would have preferred to conceal. Now Lizarann might have fallen back disconcerted on silence, even on tears, had it not been for Athelstan Taylor's keen understanding of children, and the supreme necessity for not letting them know allowances are being made for them. He said, with great presence of mind and an appearance of absolute sincerity: "Old Mrs. Fox sells it—where your Daddy lives, Lizarann. She'll let you have twopenny-worth if you say it's for me. So mind you bring it on with you when you come home." For Lizarann was to call on her Daddy on her way back from this visit. The Rector added that he should like old Christopher to try it, and this confirmed Lizarann's belief in his *bona fides*. She would not have believed his sister-in-law, who, with the best intentions, had been unfortunate enough to incur unpopularity by throwing doubt on the Flying Dutchman. This was her chief offence; but she had also questioned the accuracy of the surgical reports of the boy Frederick Hawkins, and other minor matters. So that Lizarann, while she acknowledged her kindness, took a low view—but secretly—of her intelligence.

When the children had gone away dutifully to play, discussing by the way such things as might be played at with advantage, the Rev. Athelstan said, "Now I must be getting home, or I shall be late for Mrs. Silverton." Said Mr. Challis: "Then I'll walk with you, Rector; I don't want any tea." Said the Rector: "Then I'll wait till you've had it," and waited. Presently they were walking through the long grass, overfield, having said little till the Rector spoke, as one who resumes conversation in earnest:

"What was all the interesting discussion about?"

"As far as I could gather—because they all spoke at once—they agreed in condemning the measure now before the House. But that may have been merely the common form of political discussion. There must be agreement about something to establish cordiality."

"Didn't they agree about anything else?"

"I think not—as far as I recollect. But really, in listening to discussions of this sort, I find myself handicapped by not understanding any of the terms in use. I am convinced I shall die in ignorance of what Secondary Education is, and though I talk confidently of University Extension, I am painfully conscious that the meaning I attach to it is founded, not on information of any sort, but on a washy inference that it can't mean anything else. So it's quite possible our friends were agreeing about something, and I didn't catch them at it."

"What had the M.P. to say?" asked the Rector.

"What M.P.'s generally do say. Things lay in nutshells, and called aloud for decisive handling, which there was but little reason to anticipate from a venal Press and an apathetic electorate. He would not presume to arraign the judgment of any fellow-mortal, but he would venture to call our attention to several things, and to lay before us a great variety of alternatives with which it would, sooner or later, be our bounden duty to grapple. He dwelt once more, at the risk of wearying his hearers, on the necessity for dealing with each political problem, as it arose, in a truly Imperial Spirit. I believe he did touch upon some aspects of the question of religious education, but then he also said he would not dwell upon them, and proceeded to consider everything else. I have a very vague idea of his views, but I understand they were luminous."

Athelstan Taylor thought he could detect in his friend to-day rather more than usual of his spirit of careless perversity. Something was the matter. But he made no attempt to find out what, and pursued the conversation.

"It would be interesting to know what he thought."

"It would—in view of the difficulty of inferring it from what he says. Mr. Brownrigg was more intelligible."

"What did *he* say?"

"Brownrigg pointed out. Of course! He pointed out that the subject had been exhaustively dealt with by Graubosch in his twenty-ninth volume. The forty-eighth chapter of that volume—one of its most brilliant passages—indicates the means by which all the objects of moral and religious education can be attained,

without involving the instructor of youth in the solution of a single difficult problem. Strictly speaking, all such problems will at once disappear with the abolition of Morality, Religion, and Education—changes which form a fundamental feature of the scheme of Graubosch. But each of these will be more than replaced. The Great Doctrine of Retributive Inconvenience will result, as an inevitable consequence, in the Theory of the Avoidance of Retributive Inconvenience, which will attain all the ends Morality proposes to itself, but falls very short of. Religion will cease to be a necessity to a race of beings to whom it has been pointed out in their babyhood that they will do well to comply with the Apparent Aims of the Metaphysical Check, who will supply more fully the place the human imagination has hitherto supplied with Deities so unsatisfactorily that even now monotheism is not quite agreed about their number . . ."

"Never mind me!" said the Rector, who thought Challis hesitated. "Go ahead!"

"Well—it was Brownrigg, you know; it wasn't me."

"It's all quite right, my dear fellow! I want to know now about the Education. Suppose a member of the human race refuses to pay any attention to the Apparent Aims of the Metaphysical Check . . ."

"He will come into collision, clearly, with the Doctrine of Retributive Inconvenience. In the case of young persons, on whom a certain amount of Inconvenience can be inflicted without overtaxing the Salaried Suggesters who will take the place of the so-called Educational Classes, an exact system might be formulated. Brownrigg gave as an example the case of a child refusing to comply with the System of Hypothetical Notification, under which it would be required to address propitiatory sentiments, or requests for personal benefit, to an unseen Metaphysical Check, whose hearing of the Application the Salaried Suggester might hold himself at liberty to guarantee. He might also—this was Brownrigg's point—endorse his suggestion, in the case of a child refusing to Notify, by the infliction of a certain amount of Inconvenience, tending to produce, if not an actual belief in the existence of the Metaphysical Check, at any rate a readiness to confess it, which would be for working purposes exactly the same."

The Rector shook his head doubtfully. "At present," said he, "the practice in this village is to threaten rebellious youth with the wicked fire. Would Brownrigg's substitute be as effectual?"

"You remember what he said in September—that Graubosch meant to retain the Personal Devil until the new System had had time to settle down? Just as people keep the gas on till the electric light is a certainty!"

The Rector laughed. "You'll make me as bad as yourself, Challis, before you've done." Then he became more serious. "I would give a good deal," said he, "to know what you *really* think on matters of this sort."

But Challis was persuading a pipe to light inside his hat, and no immediate answer came. One vesta had perished in the attempt. The second made a lurid flash on his face, in the shadow of the protecting hat, his invariable grey felt. As Athelstan Taylor looked at him, he saw again, more clearly than before, that the face was inconsistent with its owner's levity of tone two minutes since. He negatived his own impulse to ask questions, and waited. Perhaps it was part of a growing interest in his companion that made him mix with this curiosity, about what was going on inside that head, a wish to see the hat back on it. For the sun was still fierce at the end of a hot June day, and the soft brown hair the wind blew about so easily seemed to have little shelter in it for the somewhat delicate skin the blue veins made so much show on below, on the forehead.

"You would give a good deal," said Challis, when the pipe was well alight, "to know what I think about the religious education of children? So would I!" It was a disappointing ending. His hearer had expected something better.

"What have you done about your own boy?" said he, with a kind of magnanimous impatience. "Come! That's the point."

"Nothing. At least, I have sent him to Rugby, where he will be brought up a member of the Church of England."

"But before?"

"I left him to his mother—at least, his aunt. . . . I told you. . . ."

"I know."

"So you observe that with respect to Master Bob I have pursued a policy of well-considered devolution of responsibility. Perhaps I should say of evasion. However, I think I may lay claim to having given my son every reasonable opportunity of believing the creeds that will best advance his interests in the world. He has had the advantage of imbibing them from a lady who enjoys the privilege of being able to believe what she chooses, and has inherited or selected the tenets of the well-to-do. He has been till lately at a preparatory Academy, where every one of the masters

is in orders, and every other boy the son of a Bishop. And now he's gone to Rugby! What can a human father do more, in the name of respectability?"

"My dear Challis, if you want to make your son's education a text for a sermon against worldliness and hypocrisy, do so by all means. We have weak joints enough in our armour, God knows, for you to shoot your arrows into. But let me finish finding fault with you first."

Challis slipped his arm into the Rector's. "Go on finding fault," he said. "Don't finish too soon."

"I won't. It seems to me, my dear friend, that under cover of a complete confession you have contrived to raise issues which have nothing to do with the question before the House, which I take to be—what is a father's conscientious duty towards the child for whose existence he is partly responsible? I want to keep you to the point."

"I'm a slippery customer, I know. Go on."

"Do you, or do you not, think a parent is bound to supply a child with a religious faith? Failing the parent, is it the duty of the guardian—of the State? That seems to me to lie at the root of all questions of religious education. But our question is about the parent's duty when one exists. *Exempli gratiâ*, yourself and Master Bob! It seems to me that your policy was one of evasion, and that the devolution of responsibility upon your wife was a rather cowardly evasion. Especially as her responsibility could only be for her own children!"

Challis's hand pressed the arm he held a little more warmly. There was certainly no offence. "You are perfectly right, Rector," said he. "I took a mean advantage of a little local patch of obscurantism to get my boy inoculated in his youth with a popular form of Christianity, in order that his father's heretical ideas should not stand in the way of his advancement. But I lay this unction to my soul; that if ever he sees his way to a bishopric, nothing I have ever said to him need stand in his way. . . . Oh no!—there is no idea at present of his entering the Church. The Army is engaging his attention at this moment—and phonographs. . . . But go on pitching into me about cowardly evasions."

"I am afraid you are incorrigible, Challis. I can't help laughing sometimes. But for all that, I think you were wrong. You were wrong towards your wife, because, instead of helping her, you made her task difficult. What can be harder than to turn a child's mind into any channel with a strong counter-influence, as

a father's must needs be, constantly at work against one's efforts?"

Challis smiled in his turn. "It was Marianne, you see," he said. "I can't express it. The position was harder to deal with than you think." He then went on to tell one or two incidents connected with Bob's early indoctrinations of the Scriptures. How, for instance, when Marianne once crushed him under, "You know perfectly well, Titus, what the words of Our Lord were," and followed it up with a quotation, he had remarked in the presence of Master Bob that at any rate Jesus Christ didn't speak English; and then she had flounced out of the room white with anger, and not spoken to him for two days; and when she did at last, it was to declare that if there was to be any more blasphemy and impiety before the boy, she should go straight away to Tulse Hill, and not come back. Also, when he once innocently remarked that he believed there was now a tram-line from Joppa to Jerusalem, she had become very violent, and accused him of speaking of Jerusalem as if it was a place in Bradshaw.

The Rector considered, and then said: "I was just going to say Mrs. Challis must be unusually ill-informed, when I happened to recollect what a number of very good people are exactly like her. In fact, a very dear old friend of mine"—he was thinking of the Rev. Mr. Fossett—"is rather shocked when he hears Our Lord spoken of as a real person; and with him it isn't exactly ignorance, because he's a priest in orders. It's a phase of mind that seems to have its source in a belief that nothing can be both Good and Actual." He stopped abruptly, as one who changes a subject. "By-the-bye, should *you* have said the little person looked delicate—that little Lizarann, I mean?"

Challis had stopped to think. "N-no!" he said. "On the contrary, I thought she had such a good colour." On which the Rector said, "Ah—well!" and then more cheerfully, "Well—well!—I suppose it's all right. However, we must keep our eyes open."

"Isn't the child strong? She's a funny little party."

"Why, no!—they say she isn't. Isn't strong, I mean. Never mind! What were we talking about?"

"People and Scripture, don't you know. Things being actual. . . ."

"I know. I was just going to tell you what dear old Gus—my friend—won't forgive me for. I'll risk it. Only don't you make copy of it. . . . Very well!—mind you don't. . . . It was this. Some years ago I was urging him to marry, and he

pleaded in extenuation of his celibacy that he wished to model his life on Our Lord's in every point within his power. 'It's all very fine,' I said. 'But why do you suppose the Apostles did not model their lives on Our Lord's? Do you mean that they all led celibate lives?' Gus said this was almost an insinuation that Our Lord was or had been married. I'm sorry to say I couldn't help saying, 'Can you produce a single particle of direct evidence that Our Lord was not a widower when John baptized Him?' Gus hardly spoke to me all that day. But what hurt him was the realism of the expression 'widower.' The case was exactly on all fours with your wife's."

They were just in sight of the Rectory, and Challis had to get back in time for dinner. So he shook hands with his friend, remarking: "You will go on blowing me up another time." Athelstan Taylor replied with a cordial handshake. "You deserve it, you know!" and pulled out his watch. "I shall be in time for Mrs. Silverton," said he. But who and what that lady was this story knoweth not, neither whence she came nor whither she went. But she occurs in the text for all that.

Challis wandered back, having intentionally allowed himself time to do so, keeping out of the direct path to avoid meeting people. He liked his own company best.

His talk with Athelstan Taylor, which else could claim little place in the story, had had a curious effect on him. It had brought back vividly his early days with his wife. As he sauntered on with his eyes on the ground, choosing rather destructively special whitey-green heads of new young fern to crush down, or cutting here and there an inoffensive flower with his stick, his ears heard nothing of the wind-music in the trees, his eyes saw nothing of the evening rabbits, popping away and vanishing one by one—for which of them could say he had no gun, off hand?—as he approached. The small village maiden who stopped and stood still through a blank bar, and dropped a semiquaver curtsey in the middle and then went on *andante capriccioso,* might almost as well not have been there for any notice Challis took of her. His thoughts were back in Great Coram Street, in the dingy London home this Marianne—yes! this very Marianne—made cheerful, more than cheerful, to the industrious accountant of ten years since; who parted from her each morning looking forward to the return each evening brought to the grubby domicile he associated with so many blackbeetles in the impenetrable basement, such smells of mice in spite of such much stronger smells of cats, and

the wails and choral conclusions of these last in the backyard they held against all comers, in the small hours of so many foggy mornings.

How many escapes from the fog without to the firelight within could he recall, in those days when he rose from his office-desk without a dream of what he could have used his brain for, instead of those interminable figures! How many a shock of trivial disappointment to find that Missis wasn't home yet!—how many an insignificant reviving thrill of contentment when Missis's knock followed near upon his own arrival and his thwarted expectation! For now and again it must happen to a man that some woman he has no passionate love for, pedantically speaking, shall grow round his heart and make the comfort of his life. That was the sort of thing that had come to pass in the case of Marianne and Alfred Challis. And now, as he—the flattered guest of folk he then had never thought to sit at meat with—passed up the great beech-avenue to the house, respectfully saluted by a great gamekeeper, a Being who, in those older years, would simply have spurned him, his thoughts had all gone back to the rosy, if rather short-tempered girl who then seemed plenty for his life, and might surely have remained so, only . . . only Challis couldn't finish the sentence. Now, why was he, in his own mind, commenting a moment after on the *in*appropriateness of two lines of Browning that had come into it:

> " . . . Strange, that very way
> Love begun! I as little understand
> Love's decay."

He resented their intrusion. Who would dare to say his affection for Marianne was not what it had always been? It was—he would swear it!—and that in spite of the fact that Marianne, look you, was not now what she was in those days.

How and when had the change come over things? He was on the alert to keep Judith out of the answer to this question. He must see to that, or Unfairness, that was in the air, would twist awry the admiration of her beauty that was all mankind's—womankind's, for that matter, jealousy apart!—and put a misconstruction on his simplest actions, his most obvious feelings. He could have held his head up better, true enough, over this passage of his analytical self-torment, if only it had not been for that unhappy revelation of unspoken suspicion, by the river there, not two hours since. But be fair!—be fair! It *was* unspoken, at least! Who had said anything? As he asked the question of him-

self, Challis wiped from his brow perspiration he ascribed to the weather!

Did he not know of old how often he had deceived himself? Might not all this be self-delusion, too? At least, he had as good a vantage-ground as the man to whom some woman may often say, truly: "You have looked love, and there has been love in the pressure of your hand, in the tone of your voice. But I cannot indite you. Live safe behind your equivocations." Nay, he was safer than such a one! For in his case the more he could ignore love, the better he would discharge his duty to Judith. The other man would be the greater sneak, the more he did so.

But the question—the question! It was still unanswered. When did the change come over Marianne? Oh, he knew perfectly well! It was from the day when he began, to all seeming at her request, to go out into this accursed Society without her. Very well, then!—it was all mere glamour, the whole thing. Let him do now what he should have done at first—insist on her being his companion, among his kind as well as in his home. Then would the old Marianne come back, and all would be well.

So by the time he was two-thirds through the avenue, his thoughts had worked back into his old existence, and taken him with them. If only his knowledge of his surroundings in his daily life at home would bear him out, and help him to keep at bay this image of Judith that forced itself upon him now—this image of her as she stood in the sunset light last September, just on this very spot!

What he recognized at once as the nose of a large grey boarhound touched him gently, and he turned. There stood Saladin, satisfied to all seeming that what he had smelt was in order, but content to take no further steps. Challis glanced round, expecting to see the dog's mistress; in a sense rather afraid to do so. She was near at hand, a few paces from the pathway, and her perfect self-possession reassured him.

"I never told Saladin to disturb your reverie, Mr. Challis," she said, quite easily, and with deliberation. "The darling acted on his own responsibility." Saladin, hearing his own name, seemed to think he had leave to go, and trotted on, giving attention to tree-trunks and the like. Challis had to say something.

"Are we not late for dinner?" was what it came to.

"I believe we are, but it never matters. Did you get your letter?"

"No—I got no letter. What letter?"

"Haven't you been up at the house? It was there when I went back. I thought it looked like your wife's handwriting. I hope it's to say we shall see her on Saturday."

"I hope so, too." But Challis wasn't sanguine.

No pretence that no embarrassment exists between two people, however determined, can do more than encourage a hope that a *modus vivendi* may be found. These two persevered in theirs, because each hoped for a working pretext that would carry Challis's visit through, without further useless complications, and this one of Marianne was a good one to make a parade of their detachment about. See how anxious we both are to emphasize the perfect self-possession a friendship like ours allows!—was what it seemed to say. Each knew it was a pretext, but each was loyally ready to accept the other's belief in it as a reality.

So when Judith said those last words of hers, Challis went so cordially through the form of believing her in earnest that he powerfully helped the image he had set his mind to construct of a Marianne based on his impressions—illusions, if you must have it so!—of ten years past. Conversation that followed on the way to the house, artificial though it might be, all tended towards a cheap local apotheosis of Marianne, with a beneficial side-influence on her husband's disposition to idealize her. Thus Judith: "Of course, a change would do her so much good. Housekeeping is tiresome work."

"Yes," said Challis. "It's wearing! And if you understand what I mean, it makes her unlike herself."

"Oh, I understand so exactly. Everyone would—every woman, I mean. It has nothing to do with ill-temper."

"Nothing whatever!" Challis made the most of this. "There isn't a better-tempered creature in the world than Polly Anne." He called her a creature, though, to keep the position properly qualified. "And one knows what children are."

"They are darling little people." Judith yawned slightly. "But they are nicest when you know them as acquaintances. Too much intimacy palls. Unless they are very nice children. I am sure yours are. But all the same, Marianne would be the better for a change." And so on. But there was very little life in this talk.

None the less, Challis was feeling good about his wife, when he reached the house looking forward to finding Marianne's letter awaiting him, and carried it up into his room to read it. He was more curious to read it than to wait for the arrival of the motor, whose hoot had just become audible from somewhere near the

park-gate, a mile off. Saladin immediately started at a gallop either to sanction or condemn it, and Judith lingered, awaiting its arrival.

"I see Mr. Challis didn't go to Ashcroft," is what Sibyl says first to her sister. It refers to a projected excursion a full day long, which had been cancelled after the departure of the motor in the morning.

Judith looks ostentatiously indifferent. "No one went," she says. "It was given up. But how came you to know?"

"That Mr. Challis didn't go? We saw you from the Links, walking together in the avenue."

Judith turns with handsome languor to Lord Felixthorpe, the other occupant of the motor. "Did she?" she says. "Did you? I mean." Sibyl says: "Thank you for doubting my word! The avenue is visible from the Links."

His lordship is deliberate, as usual. The answer to Judith's first question is, he says, in the affirmative; to the second, in the negative. Identification, even of eminent authors, at a distance in an evening light, is difficult when a time-limit is fixed by the rapid locomotion of the observer. Sibyl's comment, in an undertone, Judith understands to be a caution against prosiness. But a respectful reference by Elphinstone to the many minutes ago that the first gong sounded causes a hurried flight to dress.

Challis felt good about his wife as he opened her letter; and the feeling grew rather than lessened when he saw how short it was. She must be coming, that was clear! But the satisfaction in his face died out as his eye caught the "Yr: aff: wife" at its conclusion. He read the two ill-covered pages twice and again before he threw it down with an angry "Humph!" and set himself to make up for lost time with his toilet.

He only just succeeded in scrambling into his coat in time for the second, or heart-whole, dinner-bell. All right!—he would run, directly. But it would only make him a minute late to glance once more at that letter. Besides, he could do it as he went downstairs. He did so, and ended by pocketing it just in time to appear last in the drawing-room, apologetic.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW CHALLIS HAD A NEW NEIGHBOUR AT DINNER AND METAPHYSICS AFTER. HOW HE WAS GUILTY OF EAVESDROPPING, AND MET MISS ARKROYD AFTER IN A LITTLE GARDEN CALLED TOPHET. A FOOL'S PASSION. WHAT ABOUT BOB?

THAT was a very fortunate interview in the park-avenue between Challis and Miss Arkroyd. If their sequel to that half-hour before they joined the tea-party, when they stood hand-in-hand on the edge of a volcano, had been a stiff meeting in society, the position would have become a rigid one; its joints would have ossified. Some may hold that it would have been best that they should do so, and that the lubrication of this interview was really unfortunate. It depends on how one looks at it. Efficacious it certainly was.

So efficacious that Challis almost felt at liberty to be sorry that Judith was moved to the far end of the long table at dinner, beyond his range of communication. He grudged the geometrical distance between them, while he acknowledged their moral or spiritual *éloignement*. He had to confess to his regret when a fresh dress she had on that evening rustled and glittered—it was all sparks and flashes—past the place she occupied the evening before. "We move up, like the Hatter and the Dormouse," said she to her partner.

The house-party had become enormous; indeed, some of it had oozed out into an adjoining apartment, and had a little round table all to itself—which it may be said to have forgotten, for it made a great noise.

Challis's own flank-destinies for this dinner were an elderly young lady with a bridge to her nose—a county family in herself—whom he had protected through the dangerous passage from the drawing-room; and the extraneous chit, Lady Henrietta Mountjullibardine. The latter had been provided with a counter-chit, who was always spoken of as Arthur, and seemed to be many people's cousin. The former had a powerful pair of eyeglasses on a yard-arm, or sprit, workable from below; these, Challis noticed, were manœuvred so as to leave the bridge free. He imputed powder, or something that might come off, to its owner. She seemed to have been very carefully prepared to go into So-

ciety, and to look down on it now that she had arrived. But she had to be talked to about something within its confines, and Challis had to find out what.

"I wonder what the brilliant stuff is called," said he, therefore. Judith's dress was the stuff.

"Sequin net is the name, I believe." This suggested somehow that the stuff's sphere was one grade below the speaker's.

"How much is a sequin?" asked Challis.

"It is not an expensive material," said the lady.

"I don't want a dress for myself," said Challis.

"Oh, indeed!" said the lady. Settlements ensued. And then Challis's other neighbour addressed him.

"They are in the other room this evening," said the chit. Her remark related to a mutual confidence between herself and Challis, begun on the lawn on the day of his arrival. They never spoke of anything else.

"I can hear them," said he. "They're making noise enough. But I thought they had quarrelled this morning?"

"This *morning*—oh *yes!*" This was very *empressé*. "But they made that up *long ago!*"

"When do they? . . . when are they? . . . when will it? . . . Clear, please! Oh no!—that'll do beautifully. I meant thick." This was to the servant, respecting soup.

"I'm so afraid it never *will!* Do you know, I really *am!*"

"Instances are not wanting of young ladies and gentlemen who haven't got married. . . . Hock, thank you!"

"Of *course!* But they *always* do, if they *can*. Don't they now, Mr. Challis?"

"I admit it. Unless they meet with someone they like better. Of course, that does happen."

"Oh yes—of *course!* But then it only matters when it isn't *both.*" Challis, on the watch for copy, noticed that whenever this chit italicized a word—which was frequently—she opened her large blue eyes as far as possible.

"You express it to perfection. When it's both, it doesn't matter the least. But this time it's neither, so far!"

"Oh no!—they can't *look* at anyone else."

"Nothing can be more satisfactory. But why shouldn't it? . . . why shouldn't they? . . ."

"Oh dear! I'm so afraid they never *will.* Because he has only his pay, and she has—*nothing!*" Human eyes have only limited powers of opening, and the speaker's had done all they could.

"Couldn't a rich aunt settle something on them, or someone

place a fund at their disposal? Or something of that sort? . . . What a shindy they *are* making! . . . Not before Christmas." This was because his left-hand neighbour had said sternly: "When is your next book coming out, Mr. Challis?"

But the chit had a secret knowledge of the *vera causa* of the riot in the next room, when three chits and as many counter-chits, uncontrolled, had the small round table to themselves. She knew exactly what they were doing—trying to pick up tumblers upside down, like this!—"this" being the thumb on one side, and one finger only on the top.

"I have forgotten when your last book came out, Mr. Challis." This left-hand neighbour seemed reproachful. But Challis couldn't help it. "Just eight weeks ago," said he.

A lull came in the next room, with the young soldier's voice audible in it, "Now all together, or it doesn't count!" Some sort of wager was being put to the test. Challis's chit murmured in the moments of suspense that followed, "They broke several yesterday in the billiard-room." Challis, amused, waited for the inevitable smash.

It came, and was a grand one. And the chorus of contrition and apology from the culprits was only equalled by their indignation at the way the Laws of Nature had proved broken reeds. If there was one thing more than another that the student of dynamics could not have credited, it was that under the circumstances a single tumbler should have been broken. Challis perceived that Lady Arkroyd spoke *sotto voce* to Mr. Elphinstone, who, he thought, replied, "Plenty, your ladyship. They came this morning." Then followed a fine exhibition of dexterity in the rapid collection and removal of broken glass. Challis thought to himself, but did not say so, that it reminded one of being on board ship.

The chit had done her duty by Mr. Challis, and now deserted him. Arthur had done his by Mrs. Ramsey Tomes, on his other flank, who had told him she wasn't quite sure if Mr. Tomes approved of football. She was almost certain he thought young men gave up too much time to rowing, and cricket, and lawn-tennis, and cycling, and everything else, and perfectly certain he didn't disapprove of anti-vivisection or anti-vaccination, but she wasn't quite sure which. She was not a gifted person, and was quite unable to keep pace with her husband's powerful mind. She had been freely spoken of before now, by heedless linguists, as a Juggins. Arthur deserted her with a sense of duty done, and passed the remainder of the banquet in exchanging wireless undertones

with his other neighbour. It was wonderful how much communication they seemed to get through, considering how little noise they made. It seemed to be done with eyebrows, slight facial adaptations, new ways of keeping lips closed, but rarely completed speech.

Challis was conscious that each of these young people would be the other's *menu* for the rest of the banquet, so he surrendered himself to a portentous catechism from the lady with the eyeglass touching his habits.

"Where do you write, Mr. Challis?"

"At home—when I'm at home. Or wherever I happen to be at the time." When he had said this, he wondered whether he was going idiotic. It was like saying a mother was always present at the birth of her child.

"But upstairs or down? And is the room at the back of the house?" He gave close particulars of all the rooms at the Hermitage. A capital way of making conversation! But in the end it ran dry.

"I like writing in bed," said he, for variety. "Rabelais wrote in bed." He wasn't sure of this at all. But it didn't matter.

"Oh, indeed!" said the lady. She was an Honourable Miss Something, and not nearly dissolute enough to know anything about authors who write in bed; and, besides, she had her doubts about Rabelais. She changed the conversation delicately. Did Mr. Challis use a Fountain Pen? No, he didn't. Because he thought for a quarter of an hour at every third word, and that was time enough for an active person under fifty to dip his pen in the ink. Pressmen had to write straight on without stopping. The lady took this seriously, and said, "Dear me!"

What followed was very like the sample. Challis could make talk and think of something else quite well. So he thought how different his right-hand neighbour was from Charlotte Eldridge. And that set him a-thinking again about his wife. But there were unnavigable straits in that sea. His thoughts got into shoal-water, and his neighbour pursued a topic unaccompanied until she found she had left him behind. Then indignation kindled, but subject to good-breeding. She would put a test question, though, to see how much attention this gentleman had been paying.

"How many words are there in a book?" The question came with sudden severity, and Challis had to pull himself together to reply.

"Of course," he said, "there's not always exactly the same num-

ber. But a hundred thousand, more or less." It was a good answer, and embodied a feeling current in the book-trade. And the conversation, thus re-established, developed on the same lines until the vanishing-point of the army of womankind. Challis fancied he saw commiseration on Judith's face as she brought up the rear. He certainly had seldom in his life passed a duller hour.

He knew what it was going to be next. Dreary politics, wearisome ethics, maudlin philosophy, execrable—thrice execrable!—Social Problems which it was every man's duty to confront, and every other man's duty to hear him elucidate. Yes!—there was Mr. Ramsey Tomes at it already! He had got a good new word to talk with—"noumenal"—and was brandishing it over his hearers' heads. . . .

Oh dear!—metaphysics! Not even free treatment of what Challis's mind classed as Charlottology! That always appealed to our common something or other. Now what he could catch at first hearing seemed bare, cold, cruel Metaphysics. Never an indiscreet lady nor an unprincipled gentleman, nor even a New Morality, of any sort! No fun at all!

But stop a bit! Was there none? Challis listened, and perceived, before coffee-time, that the changed guest of last September, who had become a Complete Christian Scientist, had denied the existence of matter. He took a chair nearer to the discussion, not to seem out of it, and so attracted to himself the attention of Mr. Ramsey Tomes, whose lung-power had taken possession of the rostrum.

"I appeal," said that gentleman, "to Mr. Challis." He went on with a testimonial or appreciation beginning with "than whom I will venture to say," and elucidating Challis's great accomplishments and intellectual powers, Challis seized the opportunity of a coffee-deal to ask what he was being appealed to about. A mixed response informed him on this point. A definition of Matter had been called for, and the Confirmed Christian Scientist had demurred to giving any such definition. "No one," said he, "can be logically called on to define a thing he denies the existence of. The burden of definition manifestly lies with those who affirm it."

"Personally," said Challis, "I prefer—but I admit it may be only idiosyncrasy on my part—to know, when I deny the existence of anything, what the thing is that I am denying the existence of. Perhaps I should say, rather, what it would be if it existed. If I knew, I think I should always communicate my knowledge, both from civility and as a politic act. For how the dickens anyone

else would know what I was denying the existence of if I didn't tell him, I'll be hanged if *I* know!"

An indignant murmur was perceptible round the table. It gathered force, and became a protest against this treatment of the subject. Everybody, it said, knew perfectly well what matter *was*. All that was wanted was a Definition of it.

"What *is* Matter?" said Challis. But he had some difficulty in hearing all the answers to this question. However, he caught the following:

"Obviously, there is no such distinct thing as Matter. What we call matter—stuff, substance, body, or what not—is really only a manifestation of energy."

"Obviously, Matter is a phenomenon."

"Obviously, Matter is the negation of mind."

"Obviously, Matter is the antithesis of spirit."

"Obviously, Matter is the reciprocal interdependent externalization of what used at one time to be called Forces, but which are now almost universally recognized to be merely modes of motion."

"Something you can prod." This last piece of crudity came from the young man Arthur, and attracted no attention.

Now, when several persons shout simultaneously a profound and intuitive judgment apiece, each naturally pauses to hear what effect his own has had upon the Universe. An opening for speech is then given to anyone who has the presence of mind to abstain from wasting time over the detection of a stray meaning anywhere. In this case, Mr. Ramsey Tomes saw his opportunity, and seized it.

"Am I mistaken," said he, "in supposing that at least one suggestion has been made that the Universe, as at present formulated, has but two constituents—namely, the subject under discussion, Matter, on the one hand; and on the other what has been variously called Mind or Spirit. Shall I presume too far on the attention the Philosophical Mind is prepared to vouchsafe to the voice of a mere sciolist in Metaphysical profundity if I indicate the existence of yet a third constituent of what has been not inaptly called the Universal Whole? I refer to what I may term the Unknown."

The speaker felt that this was so admirably expressed that he rashly paused to lick his lips over it. This gave Challis, who was in a malicious or impish mood, time to interject a remark. Its effect was that, for the purpose of discussing the Existence of Matter, no definition of it would be of any use to us, unless we provided ourselves also with an accurate definition of Existence.

Agreement on these two points would enable us to *approfondir* the question of the entity or nonentity of the appreciable Universe.

There seemed to be no serious difficulty, unless it were the selection of the required definitions from an *embarras de richesses*. Among those which survived the tumult of many confident voices, Challis distinguished the following:

"The relation a thing has to itself."

"The condition precedent of the concept 'nothing,' which is itself a fundamental condition of thought."

"A quality thought imputes to the external cause of every phenomenon."

"The recognition by the Ego of the reality of its environments."

"When you've nothing particular to do." This one was Arthur, who, however, was heard a moment after to say, "All right; I'll come!" in response to a summons, and thereafter went, carrying away his unfinished cigar. Challis heard his voice afar very soon, probably in the garden in the moonlight, where chits and counterchits were in council on the lawn. He wanted to go out in that garden himself, but—he supposed—he recognized the reality of his environments, like the Ego, and felt that such conduct would be rude. Besides, he was rather amused, too. What was that Mr. Brownrigg was saying?

He was pointing out, of course. Nay, more!—he was pointing out that Graubosch had already pointed out, in his Appendix B, that we had no direct evidence of any existence whatever independently of a percipient. The Confirmed Christian Scientist applauded this audibly, but remarked that that was merely Immanuel Kant, after all! On the other hand, Mr. Brownrigg continued, we have not a particle of evidence that any percipient could exist as such, independent of a percipiendum. We could not collect his evidence, clearly, without exposing ourselves to his untried observation, and thereby upsetting the conditions of the problem.

The Confirmed Christian Scientist's face fell, and he asked dejectedly, What conclusion did Graubosch draw? Mr. Brownrigg replied that Graubosch considered the problem afforded a fine instance of Metaphysical Equilibrium, which would under that name continue to engage the attention of thinkers long after the Insolubility of Problems had ceased to be admitted as a Scientific possibility. The final solution of all questions could not be regarded with complacency by a thoughtful world; and the recognition of Metaphysical Equilibrium, in questions which the Primitives of Philosophy had condemned as unanswerable, was a welcome addition to the resources of Modern Thought, for which the

world had to thank its originator and greatest exponent, Graubosch, et cetera.

Challis began to think he must really make an effort, and go. He would watch for an opportunity. It came.

The advocates of the Existence of Matter were disposed to make a stand in favour of Human Reason; in fact, they were inclined to claim for Man, before the dawn of sight, hearing, or feeling, the position of a Unit charged with Syllogism, ready to make short work of any Phenomenon that might present itself. But, then, how about anthropoid apes? Didn't Sally count up to five? Well, then—Reason be blowed! Make it perception, and include all forms of Life.

This brought up Mr. Ramsey Tomes in great force. We were now landed, he said, in a crux on the axis of which this most interesting group of problems might be said to rotate. Let the many-headed activities of Ratiocinative Speculation agree on a Definition of Life, and he would venture to say without fear of contradiction that a keynote would have been struck that would resound through the proper quarters. Challis missed their description, owing to Mr. Brownrigg's voice intercepting it resolutely.

"Surely," said he, "we need go no further than the one supplied by Herbert Spencer." Everyone listened with roused attention, and Mr. Brownrigg continued. "You will all recall it at once! 'The definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external coexistences and sequences.' It is among the few decisions of modern thought which Graubosch has been able to accept intact; and the translation he himself made of it into German surpasses, if anything, its English original in force and lucidity."

Challis thought he might go. No need to stay for the German translation. On the way from the entrance-hall into the garden, he nearly collided with the largest possible white shirt-front associated with the smallest possible black waistcoat. The owner, Arthur, the universal cousin, begged his pardon. He begged it awfully, it seemed; but why? What he added, before going away up the broad staircase four steps at a time, was enigmatical: "No gloves—only I can lend Jack a pair." Challis left the meaning of this in a state of Metaphysical Equilibrium, till the sound of music under moonlit cedars on the lawn explained it. A chit-extemporized dance was afoot on the close-cropped turf. Challis remembered this young subaltern's definition of Existence, and felt he knew what sort of definition of Life his would be.

He himself would not mix with it, under the cedars there, but would finish his cigar with his arms crossed on this ledge of clean stone balustrade, all silvery with lichens in the moonlight, where he would see and not be seen. Perhaps he would remember the name of the little creeping flowers that last September were climbing all over the shrub that half hid him; that were only pledges as yet, but that he knew the morning sun would soon make rubies of. Cockney that he was, he had had to ask the little flower's name of Judith, as she stood on that gravel path below, near ten months back. What a short time it seemed! Petroleum?—No!—Protæolum, was it?—No!—that wasn't it exactly. But near enough! . . .

Footsteps were coming along the pathway now. Was it honourable to overhear what those two girls were discussing in the moonlight? Pooh!—stuff and nonsense! These chits—the idea! What *could* those children have to say that they could mind his hearing? Besides, they would never know; and he could cough at a moment's notice.

"You could have lawts of awfers, if you liked, Flawcey. I know a girl that's had eleven awfers. I've had three awfers. I suppose now it is Jack I shan't have any maw awfers." The sweet drawler, who is of course the speaker, has rather a rueful sound over this.

"I could have been engaged twice," says the other; "only one was forty-five, and the other was a Hungarian."

They do not interest the drawler. She ripples on musically: "Of cawce, I shall have Cerberus, because he belawngs to Jack. Oh, he is a dahling!" Then the two go out of hearing; but the drawl is there, in the distance still. Challis notes afar, under the cedar-trees, how Chinese lanterns are coming to birth in the twilight. There will only be real darkness quite late to-night.

Two other voices are audible near for a few seconds, with a roused interest for Challis, whose sense of eavesdropping increases. Before he can decide on stopping his ears, he has heard Sibyl say: "I have eased my conscience, and you can't blame *me,* whatever happens!" She is speaking as one who has the Universe on her shoulders. Judith's answer is lost, rather to his relief, all but the *timbre* of its resentment.

Here come the chits back! *They* don't matter. What's the story now?

"Oh, it was hawrible! If only it had been an awdinary eyeglass, with a string!"

"But then it would have had to be fished up, you know!"

"Of cawce it would. I didn't think of that. Perhaps it's just as well it wawse a lens. . . . No, it was quite easy how it happened, if you think!"

"But whatever did you do?"

"Of course, d'ya, we both pretended it had rolled on the floor, and kneeled down to look for it. But we both knew quite well where it was, and I could feel it cold all down my back. Oh, it was hawrible!" The speaker added thoughtfully after a pause: "I am so glad it's Jack now, and not Sholto. He did look such a fool, and *such* strong cigars!"

Challis was able, being a dramatist, to put an intelligible construction on this little dramatic experience of the young lady and her previous admirer. We need not probe into its obscurity, as its only interest in this story is that it reminded him of an incident of his own bygone youth—the disappearance of a pearl from a ring of his first wife's, and its resurrection from the inside of his own stocking after setting him limping, inexplicably, all the way home to his rooms from her mother's house. Oh, the ridiculous trifles of life!—nothing at the time, but all-powerful for sadness in the days to come.

So powerful, in this case, that he was less than ever ready for the sphere of pink and green illumination and dance-music, just becoming self-assertive. Of course!—those young monkeys were hanging about in the suburbs merely in order to be fetched. They knew their value, bless you! So Challis thought to himself as he lit another cigar, sauntering among the cut yew-hedges of a side-garden. A wing of the house was between him and the dancers, and their sounds were dim. But from a back-window of the room he had left a quarter of an hour since still came such noise as is inevitable when a number of close reasoners with strong lungs go seriously to work on the Nature of Things, and point out each other's fallacies. "Word-changers in the Temple of the Inscrutable," thought Challis to himself, as he turned to seek congenial silence farther afield.

He would find it, he knew, if it were nowhere else in the world, in the sweet little rose-garden called, for no sane reason, "Tophet."

He and Judith had walked there more than once on his previous visit, and he had surmised that its most inapt name might be connectable with the now common word *toff*, meaning a person of birth and position—a descendant of ancestors. Judith had asked why, and he had told her she would never be an etymologist at that rate. Bother *why!*

It was a very exclusive little garden certainly—if that would make a reason—with four high stone walls and a very small door with a very large key. Perhaps this was locked. It was sometimes. But no one had ever confessed to having locked it. And the large key always hung on a hook almost in the lock's pocket, so to speak. A very old gardener had told Challis it was done on the understanding it might be used. "I see," said Challis. "'Locke on the Understanding.'" And the old gardener had said "Ah!" with perfect unsuspicion.

This night it seemed that someone had taken advantage of the understanding, for the key was in the lock, and the door stood partly open. Someone must be inside. There was an unaccountable little grating in the door one could look through. Challis did so, and saw who it was—the woman in the moonlight.

It was strange how his relations with this woman had changed since their walk by the river two days since; when, mind you!—not a word had been spoken to which either ascribed a meaning that could have changed them. A few days ago theirs was a normal friendship enough, bearing in mind difference of age and social standards; always factors in human problems all the world over, shut our eyes to them as we may! Now, the weft of *his* consciousness at least was hot with a new disturbing tint. Why, in Heaven's name, else, need his first instinct be to turn and run? And all because, forsooth, he had come on Judith Arkroyd walking in a garden! Surely all the circumstances were vociferous enough of detachment and independence, for both, to make a start and a quickened pulse enormously illogical. Why will emotions never be logical?

One thing is certain, that he did all but turn and slip quietly away. He accounted to the upper stratum of his consciousness for this by referring it to a strong desire to be alone and "think over things." But he had to ignore a mind-flash that had crossed its lower stratum—one the story should almost apologize for recording, as too improbable—a sudden image of his odious neighbour, John Eldridge; which he knew, without hearing anything, had said: "You can't stand that, Master Titus—never do!—never do at all!" Again, this story is compelled to disclaim all responsibility for Challis's mental oddities. But they have to be recorded, for all that.

Perhaps that speech of Sibyl's, in the garden just now, had something to answer for. What had she been protesting against? Not the stage; that was all over and done with. Challis never detected his own absurdity in jumping to the conclusion that the

protest must have related to himself! What right had he to infer, from a tone of Judith's voice, that she spoke about him?

He did not run, though he went near it. Self-contempt stepped in. What imbecile cowardice! What a miserable fear that he would lose the whip-hand of a fool's passion he was not even prepared to admit the existence of! He—Alfred Challis—who but half-an-hour ago had been moved to a puny heartache over that memory of the pearl and its wanderings and recovery! And then, to stagger in a fraction of time all sane contemplation of past and present, came the clash between that memory and his moment of shame, a short while since, that "poor Kate's" place in his heart had so soon been filled by poor slow Marianne. His wife now!—how his brain reeled to think of it all! There was that home of his, and the children, and Bob; the thought of the boy as good as stung him. What should he—what could he—say to Bob hereafter, if . . .?

CHAPTER XXXI

CONCERNING A ROSEBUD, AND MARIANNE'S TORTOISESHELL KNIFE. CHALLIS'S PRESENCE OF MIND. THE FOOL ON FIRE. DEFINITION WANTED OF DEFINITION. CHALLIS'S SUDDEN CALL BACK TO TOWN. HOW SIBYL HAD SEEN IT ALL

THERE was a little fountain in the middle of the little garden, with a little *amorino* from the court of the Signoria at Florence to attend to the squirting. The moon was comparing the light she could make on its shower of drops with sparkles from the lady's dress who stood beside it. It was in no hurry to decide—might perhaps ask a tiny cloud, that was coming, to help. Once inside the garden Challis was committed to approaching its centre. There was—remember!—no official recognition of any change in the position of the two since Trout Bend.

"I came here to be alone, but you may come." Judith's words might well have made matters worse. But her tranquil, unconcerned, almost insolent beauty in the moonlight was fraught with a sense of self-command that more than counterbalanced them. It gave her hearer a sort of *rangé* feeling—determined his position—put him on his good behaviour. He could trust to her control of their interview, but all the same a little resented feeling so much like a child in her hands.

"I came here to be alone, too," said he.

"Perhaps I ought to go?" Manifestly not spoken seriously, but not jestingly enough to set *badinage* afoot. She did not wait for his answer, but went on, "Perhaps we both ought, for that matter. Did you find the politics bored you? . . . oh!—metaphysics, was it? *I* came here because I found my little sister unendurable."

Challis thrust what he had overheard, when eavesdropping, into the background of his mind: "About the stage, I suppose? Why do you not tell her—set her mind at ease?" But he knew Sibyl knew already, and this was only to help him to keep his foreground clear.

Judith appeared to select her answer at leisure, from among reserves. "Sibyl knows," she said. "The indictment related to something else this time." Then, as though she were weighing a

possibility: "No—I suppose I could hardly tell you about that. One is too artificial. We should be much nicer if we were small children. Never mind! Some day, perhaps!"

Challis decided on saying, with a laugh, "I suppose I mustn't be inquisitive and ask questions," as the best way of suggesting that his own guesses, if any, were trivial and impersonal. She ended a silence in which he fancied the subject was to be forgotten by saying: "I should tell you nothing, whatever you asked. Besides, you have never had a little sister, and would not understand. Family relations are mysteries."

"No, I have never had a little sister." And then Challis felt like a liar, and heart-sick as he thought of the thoroughness with which he had accepted Kate's "little sister" as his own. What a compensation he had thought her for a mother-in-law his most gruesome anticipations had not bargained for! When did the change come about?—when?—when? Why need the memory of it all come on him now, of all times? But Judith stopped his retrospect short with: "Get me that rose-bud, if you have a knife. Don't scratch yourself on my account." For Challis to reply: "What care I how much I scratch myself, if it is on your account?" would have savoured of Chitland, musically audible afar. Challis left it unsaid.

The rose-bud was soon got with the aid of a little tortoiseshell knife that was really Marianne's. There was another twinge in ambush for her husband over that, and a sharp cross-fire between it and the soul-brush, that was being kept at work all this while—unconsciously, one hopes; but this story knows exactly what Charlotte Eldridge would have thought and said. And she might have been right, for it makes little pretence of being able to see behind the veil this Judith's beauty hides her inner soul with, nor to read her heart. All it, the story, has known of her so far has been that beauty and her love of power. A perilous quality, that!

All it can say now is that if this woman knows, as she bends, careless how close, to take the flower from the hand that gathered it; as she flashes the diamonds on her white fingers quite needlessly near his lips—if she has any insight, as she does this, into the way she is playing with a human soul, then is she a thoroughly bad woman. And to our thinking all the worse if she knows, or believes, her reputation is safe in her own keeping. For then what is she, at best, but a keen sportswoman wicked enough to poach on her fellow-woman's preserves, destroying the peace of a home merely to show what a crack shot she is. We must confess to a preference for the standard forms of honourable, straightforward

lawlessness. But perhaps these reflections are doing injustice to Judith. She may be capable of good, honest, downright wickedness. Remember that she is comparatively young and inexperienced.

One should surely beware, too, of doing injustice to beautiful women—ascribing to them motives of overt fascination, to entangle man, in every simple action a discreet dowdy might practise unnoticed and unblamed. Make an image of such a one in your mind—make it ropy, bony, obliging, with unwarrantable knuckles—let it place a flower in its bosom, if any; and then say whether Charlotte Eldridge's keenest analysis could detect in its action the smallest element she could pounce on as seductive; the slightest appearance of a hook baited to captivate her John, or anybody else's? No, no!—let us be charitable, and suppose, for the present, at any rate, that Judith was unconscious in this flower incident of every trace of guile—merely *wanted* the flower, in fact, and asked Challis to get it, rather than risk her "Princess" skirts in the thorns which would have made shoddy of them in no time.

There are those, we believe, who hold that all the fascination of woman is due to adjuncts; that the thrill of enchantment that "goes with" adroit coiffures and well-cut skirts—especially the latter—would not survive seeing their owner, or kernel, run across a ploughed field in skin-tights—for we assume that the Lord Chamberlain would allow no more crucial experiment. It may be they are right. High Art teaches us the truth of the converse proposition. For that draggled-tailed, ill-hooked, ill-eyed, ill-buttoned thing with a bad cold and a shock of tow on its head, that is emerging from a damp omnibus to the relief of its next-door neighbour, is going, please—when it has got rid of some raiment which would certainly go to the wash with advantage—is going to sit for *Aphrodite,* of all persons in the world; for that very goddess and no other!—for her the light of whose eyelids and hair in the uttermost ends of the sea none shall declare or discern. . . .

There!—it's no use talking about it, and stopping the story. Besides, Miss Arkroyd "had on" her "Princess" dress aforesaid, a strange witchery of infinitely flexible woven texture, snake-scaled and gem-fraught without loss of a fold, rustling and glittering till none could say which was rustle and which was glitter. And it all seemed a running comment on its owner—its pith and marrow, as it were!—a mysterious outward record of her inner self. Where is the gain of trying to guess how much was shell and how much was self? Enough that few women would have looked as lovely as she did, then and there.

For all this speculation—let the story confess it—is due simply to the excessive beauty the moonbeams made the most of, as its owner's eye dropped on the flower her fingers were adjusting, to make sure it was exactly in the right place, and to engineer stray thorn-points that else might scratch. As for what is really passing in her heart, the story washes its hands of it.

"Marianne refuses again, of course," said she, when the rose was happily settled—or sadly, as it must have felt the parting from its stem.

"Again, of course!" said he. "But . . .!"

"But how did I know, you mean? Why, you would have told me at once if she had been coming."

"Not necessarily. I might have hoped for a second letter, to say she had changed her mind. It is no pleasure to me that she refuses."

"It might be to some husbands. But you are an affectionate husband. Do tell me something."

"Anything!" His emphasis on this was a satisfaction to him. It was like a very small instalment of what he had no right to say, or even to think; but, uttered in an ambush of possible other meanings, it franked the speaker of any particular one among them.

"If I were to ask to see her letter, should you be offended?"

He knew he could not answer, "Nothing you do can possibly give me offence," in the tone of empty compliment that would have made it safe. He gave up the idea, and said, with reality in his voice: "I should not show it to you."

"I like you when you speak like that," said Judith.

He felt a little apologetic. "After all," he said, "it's only tit-for-tat. *You* wouldn't tell me what Sibyl said."

"*I* am not offended," said Judith. A certain sense of rich amusement in her voice made these words read: "I take no offence at your male caprices. I know your ways. You are forgiven." But aloud her speech was, with a concession to seriousness: "I cannot well repeat what Sibyl said. But do not think of showing me Marianne's letter if you wish not to do so. It is not idle curiosity that made me ask to see it. I had a motive—perhaps not a wise one—but I think . . ."

"What?"

"I think you would forgive it." The suggestion certainly was that the speaker would see some way of influencing Marianne—making her drop her absurd obstinacy. No other motive was possible, thought Challis.

After all, what was there in the text of the letter that it would

be a hanging matter for Judith to read? She, from her higher standpoint—for Challis believed in her, you see?—could forgive, overlook, understand a scrap or two of rudeness, a misspelt word or so. Why should he not show the letter, and have done with it?

"It is in your pocket, you know!" Judith was certainly *clairvoyante,* and Challis said so. "*Clairvoyante* enough to see you put it in your pocket as you came into the drawing-room!" said she, laughing.

Why this context of circumstances should make Challis plead illegibility by moonlight as a reason for not producing the letter he could not have said for the life of him. It was a weak plea; because, when Judith "pointed out" that so inveterate a smoker probably had wax vestas in his pocket, it seemed to leave him no line of defence to fall back upon. He produced the letter, and to our thinking was guilty of a breach of faith to Marianne in allowing Judith to take it from him. At least, he should only have read to her what related to the invitation.

The first wax vesta blew out, and the second. "Hold it inside this," said Judith, making a shelter for the third with a gauzy thing of Japanese origin she really had no need for, the night was so warm. "You must hold it steadier than that," she added. "If this caught, it would blaze up." She was holding the open letter herself, with perfect steadiness.

"This is the last vesta," said Challis. "So you must read quick. Look sharp!" It was the fifth match, and the flame was nearing his fingers.

"Half-a-second more!" said Judith. She had turned the letter over. There was writing on the back that Challis had missed. He tried to read it now, over the shoulder that was so white in the moonlight, and failed. For the flame touched his fingers, and burned him.

Man is absolutely powerless against the sudden touch of fire. Remember Uncle Bob and the knife! Challis *had* to leave go, *nolens volens.* The burning remnant of the wax fell on the gauzy scarf, which caught instantly. The moment was critical. But Challis showed a presence of mind beyond what one is apt to credit neurotic literary men with—mere mattoids, after all! Instead of trying to beat the flame out, or waiting to get his coat off to smother it, he tore the scarf sharply away from its wearer, who, happily, had the nerve to release a safety-pin in time to get it clear.

"Are you burned?" His voice seemed out of keeping with the resolution of his action.

"Very little, if at all. Just a touch, on this shoulder. Nothing really—but I am afraid your hands . . ."

"Oh no!—they're all right. Stop a bit!—what's that?" It was Marianne's letter, half-burned, and still burning. The unextinguished scarf it had fallen to the ground with had got through its combustion briskly. Challis was only just in time to save half the letter; and it was not the half he wanted.

"I dare say it doesn't matter," said he to Judith, "but there was something I hadn't read on the back. What you were reading when the match gave out."

"Yes—I think there was. A postscript. I didn't make it out. Shall we go in, or over on the lawn, where they are dancing?" She added a moment later: "I don't know why I am taking it for granted that you don't dance."

"I certainly don't; nowadays, at least. But you do, of course. The lawn by all means!" They passed through the little *portiçino*, and complied with the understanding it had entered into. As Challis was turning the key, he paused an instant to look round at Judith and say: "Are you sure you can't remember anything of what was written on the back of the letter?" And she replied without hesitation: "Not a word. I had no time." Then he said: "I wish you could remember only just one word or two, to show what it was about." She answered: "But I can't. I am sorry. We must hope it was of no importance."

They walked side by side, without speaking, to the end of the last yew-hedged terrace, just on the open garden. Then, inexplicably, they turned and went back along the path. When they arrived again at the little gate in the wall, Challis suddenly faced his companion. He looked white and almost handsome in the moonlight—or so she may have thought, easily enough—for his eyes had a large, frightened look, that became them and the thoughtful thinness of their bone-marked setting. He spoke quite suddenly, keeping his voice under, with quick speech that showed its tension.

"Judith—Judith Arkroyd! It is no use. I can bear it no longer. I must leave you. It would have been well for me if I had done so earlier. It would have been best for me if I had never seen you." He turned from her, almost as though he shrank from the sight of her, and leaned against the grey stone angle of the little doorway, his face hidden in his arms. Had the woman who watched him—shame if it were so!—a feeling akin to triumph, as she saw how his visible hand caught and clenched and trembled in the moonlight? It may have been so. The story has no plummet to take soundings of her heart.

Her mere words may have meant fear lest she had overplayed her part—no more! "Oh, Scroop, you cannot blame me." But the way she too leaned, as for support in dizziness, on the edge of a great Italian garden-pot, raised on a pedestal at the path-corner, and pressed her hand to her side as though her breath might catch the less for it—these things seemed to belong to more than the alarm of a sudden start.

He turned, with some recovery of self-possession, as one who shakes free of any unmanliness. "Blame *you,* Judith!" he cried, calling her freely by her name—a thing he had never yet done. "Not I, God knows! I am all self-indictment, if ever man was. And this, look you, is my offence: that I, knowing myself as I am, knowing what I owe to my wife, to my children—they are dear to me still, I tell you, believe it who may!—that *I* have allowed the image and presence of *you,* Judith Arkroyd, to take such possession of me, my mind, my whole soul, that you are never absent from me. And the bondage that is on me is one I cannot see the end of. All I know is that I am powerless against it. It may be—it *may* be—that the memory of you will die out and leave me—that when I see you no longer, your voice and your beauty will become things of the past, and be forgotten. When we have parted, as we must, Heaven grant me this oblivion! But I cannot conceive it now."

He paused, and as he wiped the drops from his brow, seemed to hark back a little to his daily self, saying in a quick undertone: "It is a good world to forget in. Precedents are in favour of it. There is that to be said."

The little change in his manner made her find her voice. "Yes!" she said. "I see how it is. You must go. I shall always grieve that I could not keep your friendship . . . yes—you see my meaning? I *have* valued it. But this kind of thing is the misfortune of some women. It is a bitter thing—we must part in a few hours, so I may speak plainly—a bitter thing to be forced to lose a friend one loves as a friend, merely because one chances to be a woman."

If only this interview might have ended here! If only Mr. Ramsey Tomes and Mr. Brownrigg could have come on the scene now, instead of five minutes later! But there never was good came of last words, from the world's beginning.

The unhappy, storm-tossed man and his tormentor—for that was what Judith was, meaningly or without intent—turned to go back towards the noisy world. Half-way, as though she would use the silence and darkness of the alley they were passing through for

the freedom of speech such surroundings give, Judith spoke again. If Charlotte Eldridge had been there, her interpretation of Judith certainly would have been: "*She* doesn't mean to let him go—not she!" Would it have been a fair one?

Possibly. But all Judith said was: "I am afraid I am a woman without a heart."

Challis said interrogatively: "Because . . .?" and waited.

"Because I find myself only thinking of what *I* shall lose when you go. If I were *good,* Scroop"—a slight sneer here—"I should have a little thought for you. I suppose I'm bad. Very well!"

"I am taking no credit to myself for any sort of altruism in my—my feelings towards yourself." Challis shied off from the use of the word "love"; but whether because it would have rung presumptuously without the sanction of its object, or because of the bald rapidity of its use on the stage, where Time is of the essence of the contract, he might have found it hard to say.

"I should not thank you for it. Nor any woman. But many a woman who injures a friend unawares—being unselfish and pious and so on—would gladly . . ." She hesitated.

"Put a salve to the wound?"

"Well—yes—that sort of thing! But I am afraid I am rather brutal about it. Can you not, after all, forget this foolish infatuation for my sake? Consider the wild words you spoke just now unsaid, and give me back my friend. Come, Scroop!" Her beautiful eyes were surely full of honest appeal—no *arrière pensée* Mrs. Eldridge would have damned her for—as she went frankly close to him and laid her hand on his.

He shrank from her—absolutely shrank!—and gasped as though her touch took his breath away. He found no words, and she had not finished.

"Think—oh, think!—what rights could I ever have in you? Think of your wife. . . ."

"I do think of her—oh, I do think! But it makes me mad."

"Go back to her and forget me then, if it must be so. Remember this, Scroop—that the bond that holds you to her is thrice as strong as it would be if . . ."

"If what?"

"Well!—I must say it. If it were a legal one. . . ."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean you are not married to her—there!"

"Oh, the Deceased Wife's Sister rubbish?"

"Yes." And then Challis thought to himself, through the fog of all his soul-torture and perplexity, "How comes she to be so

ready to go home to the mark? *We* have never talked beyond the bare fact that Marianne and Kate were sisters." But he let the thought go by, to make way for another of greater weight with him.

"You never can mean," he cried—"you—you—you never can mean that *I*——" She interrupted him with the self-command that seemed to belong to her—to grow upon her, if anything—and completed his speech for him: "That you would take advantage of a legal shuffle to evade a promise given in honour? Of course, I mean the exact reverse. I mean that you, of all men, would hold yourself three times bound to an illegal contract."

"All men would, worth the name of men. Debts Law disallows are debts of honour. But all that is nothing. I love my wife. I tell you I love my wife; I will not have it otherwise." His voice was almost angry, as against some counter-speech. But he dropped it in a kind of exhaustion, with a subdued half-moan. "What have I to do," said he wearily, "with all these wretched nostrums of legislation and religion, that would dictate the terms of Love? Mine have come to me, and my soul is wrenched asunder. Surely the penalty is enough to make beadledom superfluous. No man who knows what Love means will ever love two women. . . . There—that's enough!" He stopped abruptly, as cutting something needless short. She spoke:

"It comes to good-bye, then?"

"Yes—unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"You will say I am strange."

"You are. But you cannot change yourself. Speak plainly!"

"Listen, Judith! If you can look me in the face and say you have no love for me—you know the sense I use the word in as well as I—then I will pack away a sorrow in my heart till it dies; and the time will come when you shall say: 'That man is my good friend, but he declared a fool's passion to me once, for all that, and now he seems to have forgotten it.' It shall be so. But, better still, and easier for me, if you could say with truth that there was some other man elsewhere whose hand in yours would be more welcome than mine; whose voice, whose look, whose lips would be a dearer memory. If you could tell me this, the fool's passion would at least be all the shorter lived." He stopped as they reached the end of the sheltered path, and looked her full in the face. He had stopped, as it were, on a keynote of self-ridicule—the habit was inveterate—and he was one of those men who are at their best when individuality comes out strongest.

She had never looked so beautiful in his eyes as when she stood there, silent in the moonlight, weighing to all appearance the answer she should make. Perhaps she knew how beautiful—who can say? She remained motionless through a long pause—through the whole of a nightingale's song in the thicket hard by. Then her bosom heaved—a long breath—and then, with a sort of movement of surrender of her hands—how the diamonds flashed!—she said, "I cannot," and then again, "No—I cannot." Then, in a more measured and controlled voice: "This means that we must part—now! I shall not see you to-morrow."

"Strangers and foes do sunder and not kiss," said Helena to Bertram. But how about those who are neither foes nor strangers, yet must be more than friends, and dare not be lovers? An interview of this sort had best not end in an embrace, if two victims of infatuation are to be saved from themselves. Let the description remain for Judith as well as Challis. But she had the self-command to check his impulse, throwing out her jewelled hands against it, and crying—not loudly, but beneath her breath: "No—no—no! Remember what we are—what we must be. For Heaven's sake, no madness!" And then, as he let fall his hands and their intention, but with all his hunger on him, and the foreknowledge of sleepless hours to come, she turned towards the voices that were approaching them from the house.

"I cannot recall"—it was Mr. Tomes who couldn't—"any occasion on which a discussion of so abstruse, and I may say elusive, a topic has been conducted with more philosophical insight, and a stronger sense of what I need not scruple to term the argumentative *meum* and *tuum*. Neither am I prepared to admit what possibly inexperience in debate may be eager to affirm, that the ratiocinative perspicuity of a post-prandial collective intelligence has been fruitless in result. I may point with satisfaction to at least two conclusions—the impossibility of drawing safe inferences in discussions where the same word is used in several different senses, and the uselessness of the attempt to define the meaning of words until we are agreed upon the nature, and, I may add, the legitimate limits, of Definition." Mr. Tomes paused. He was a little disconcerted at the discovery that he was being intelligible by accident, and also he had caught sight of Challis and Miss Arkroyd. His abrupt full-stop as he met them was unwelcome to this former, who would have had the orator continue, to hide his own perturbation. But it did not matter, for Judith was more than equal to the occasion.

"I have narrowly escaped being burned alive, Mr. Tomes. Mr. Challis set fire to me lighting his cigar. However, he put me out." Nothing could exceed her easy grace and perfect self-possession.

Very fortunately Mr. Wraxall, the Universal Insurer, was one of Mr. Tomes's companions. The opportunity was a splendid one, and he seized upon it. Challis got away in a most dastardly manner, leaving Judith exposed to risks and averages and premiums beyond the wildest dreams of Negotiation run mad. As a matter of fact, Mr. Wraxall must have been welcome enough. When life jars, let others do the volubility, and spare us!

The dispersal of guests and the family at the foot of the great staircase was to-night more tumultuous than usual. Not only was the house-party at its maximum—its noisy maximum!—but many outsiders from the neighbourhood were among the dancers. Challis noticed, though whether as cause or consequence he never inquired, four more young soldiers, who, he understood, had come from as far off as it would take a blood mare in a dog-cart, that just held them and no room to spare, an hour and fifty minutes to trot back to, over a good road. These youths were in such tremendous spirits that when the last farewells of the dog-cart died away on the offing, a sort of holy hush seemed to ensue, and people drew long breaths, and smiled excusefully—for young folk are young folk, you know—and said now we could hear ourselves speak. Why was it that Challis, not unobservant, for all his own hidden fever, pictured the occupants of the dog-cart, beyond the offing, as speaking little now, each dwelling on his own private affairs? Was it because four corresponding chits, at least, had hushed down and become self-absorbed and absent? And where was the relevance of measles, and Challis's thought to himself that it was best to have them young?

The Rector was there, too. He had not been a dancer, but had refrained merely because, in view of this great accession of force from Jack's and Arthur's friends from the garrison, no further male dancers were wanted. When Challis reached the house, after prolonging a voluntary ostracism in the garden-silences until he heard the guests dispersing, and saw Chinese lanterns being suppressed, he found Athelstan Taylor just on the point of taking leave. He was explaining to her ladyship why he had not come to dinner—for it seemed he had been invited—when she stopped him with a question about one of the children who came into his explanation. His reply was: "Oh yes!—just a bad inflammatory

cold. But she'll be all right in a day or two. Only we shall have to be careful. Good-night, Lady Arkroyd!"

"'I think it is good-morrow, is it not?'" said Challis, quoting. "Is Charles's Wain over the new chimney, I wonder. Perhaps, Rector, you know which Charles's Wain is. I don't. I always confuse between him and Orion."

"You'll have a hard job to do so now. Why, my dear fellow, can't you remember how we talked of Orion last Autumn, and he was hardly visible even then?"

"I remember—in your garden. You must show him to me again some day!" The Rector looked attentively at the speaker. He had caught the minor key in his voice; it had crept in alongside of a misgiving. "I shall lose this friend I would so gladly keep, cloth or no!"

"All right! But you mustn't stop away till Orion comes. When shall I tell my sister to lay a place for you? I believe we are clear next Thursday—will that do?" He took out a notebook for an entry.

"I'm sorry," said Challis. "But I'm obliged—I was just going to tell Lady Arkroyd—I am obliged to return to town to-morrow. I had a letter to-day, calling me back on business. It's a case of compulsion—oh no!—nothing wrong. A mere matter of business relating to publication!"

Her ladyship's sorrow at losing her distinguished guest knew no bounds. She must look forward to seeing him in town, where the family would return in a fortnight. But Mr. Challis would stay over to-morrow. No!—Mr. Challis couldn't do any such thing, thank you! He ought to go by the early train—was sorry to give trouble—but if he and his box could be taken to the railway early enough . . . Oh no!—*he* didn't mind breakfast at 6.30, only it was the trouble! But as Lady Arkroyd's heart was rejoicing—hostesses' hearts do—at her guest getting clear of the mansion before she was out of bed, she was able, from gratitude, to make her grief at his departing at all almost a reality. Otherwise she was consciously relieved that he should go; but as for any mental discomfort on the score of her daughter's relations with him—the idea!—a middle-aged, married, professional man! The eleventh century to the rescue!

Athelstan Taylor said "Good-bye, then!" with real regret, especially as there was something wrong, manifestly. His first instinct was to forswear driving back with Miss Caldecott to the Rectory, and to persuade Challis to walk "part of the way" with him. But—breakfast at 6.30, and Charles's Wain over the new chimney.

or its equivalent! After all, he was human. Only, what a pity! A talk with him might have meant so much to Challis.

Sibyl's regrets merely meant, "See how well-bred I am, to be able to conceal my rejoicing! Go away, and don't call in Grosvenor Square when I'm there! Do not give my kind regards to your wife, though a worthy woman, no doubt!" That is, if Challis translated an overflow of suave speech rightly.

Other *adieux* followed, genuine enough. Mr. Brownrigg was honestly sorry to lose the opportunity of showing Mr. Challis those extracts from Graubosch. Mr. Wraxall was seriously concerned at not being able to supply the figures necessary to a complete understanding of Differential Equivalents, a system by which all deficits would be counteracted. Mr. Ramsey Tomes said he should always regard with peculiar satisfaction the opportunities for which he was indebted to his friend Sir Murgatroyd, of shaking the hand of an author of whom he had always predicted a very large number of remarkable things, "considering"—thought his author—"that he does not appear to have read any of my immortal works." The Baronet himself seemed to be developing a scheme for correlating Feudalism with everything else, in connection with his regret that Mr. Challis had to go away next morning, until her ladyship reminded him that Mr. Challis had to go to bed. So at last Mr. Challis went.

Sibyl hung back. Judith had not gone up yet, she said, in answer to her mother's "I suppose you do mean to go to bed, child, some time!" Why, then, couldn't she leave Judith till breakfast to-morrow? But her ladyship stopped short of pushing for an answer, for she mixed "Good-night" with a yawn, and got away upstairs.

Mr. Elphinstone testified discreetly that he could hear Miss Arkroyd coming. Yes—there she was! Who was that with her? Only the young girl, Tilley, miss! This was what the name Cintilla had become, naturally, in the mouths of the household.

"Go up, child, and see that my hot water isn't cold. Cold hot water is detestable. . . . *Yes,* Sibyl?" This was in answer to a particular method of saying nothing, containing an intention to say something disagreeable presently.

"I didn't say anything."

"Please don't be tiresome. You know what I mean, quite well. What was it you didn't say?"

"I suppose you know Mr. Challis is going away to-morrow?"

Judith's demeanour is exemplary. Something pre-engages her.

Mr. Challis must come after. She calls the little ex-dairymaiden back; and then, turning to Mr. Elphinstone, waiting patiently to be the last to retire, says to him, "What is good for a burn, Elphinstone?"—as to a universal referee. He replies, "I always use olive-oil, miss," as if he belonged to a particular school of singed butlers. "Give the child some for me," says Judith; and then, being free to give attention to her sister, goes on with, "Yes, what is it? Oh yes! Do I know Mr. Challis is going away to-morrow? Of course I know Mr. Challis is going away to-morrow."

"I thought you did," says Sibyl. This is hardly consecutive, but Judith's equanimity is impregnable. No impertinences or aggressions are to affect it, that's clear! She is easily able to compare the watch on her wrist with the hall-clock, and to find their testimony is the same, for all their difference of size, before she makes further answer.

"Mr. Challis is called away by business. So he says. . . . Good-night!" Cintilla, or Tilley, will bring the magic oil; so Judith goes upstairs leisurely. Her sister follows. But she has not said good-night yet.

Telepathy makes very funny terms, sometimes, between sisters. And a fact ignored, that has called for comment, may broach a reciprocal consciousness that will never be at rest without speech in the end. This time it is that burn, which Sibyl has said nothing about—has asked no explanation of. And both know it.

At the stair-top both sisters say good-night, with a sort of decision that seems overloaded for the occasion. But the valediction seems inoperative; as both wait, for no apparent reason. Then Sibyl speaks in a quick undertone:

"You wouldn't listen to me, Ju . . . No, you needn't be frightened—they're not coming yet. . . ." For Judith had glanced back down the staircase. "You wouldn't listen, and now you see what has come of it."

"What *has* come of it?"

"Judith!—do you think I am blind, or do you take me for a fool?"

"Yes, dear—the last! But go on. I can wait any time, in reason, for an explanation." She embarked on a period of waiting, gracefully indulgent, a tranquil listener.

"Do you suppose I am taken in by this story?"

"What story?"

"This story of Mr. Challis's going home on business."

"It's a very simple story."

"Very simple . . . oh dear!—there's the girl. I'll tell you in the morning. . . ."

"I want to hear now. . . . Put it in my room, child, and go to bed." And Cintilla says, "Yes, miss!" and vanishes to an innocent pillow. "I want to hear now, and perhaps you'll be so kind as to tell me."

"Come into my room!"

"Certainly!" Judith complies without reserves, dropping gracefully into an armchair, after placing her candle in safety. She makes a parade of her waiting patience. Sibyl, all aflame with flashing eyes, turns on her after closing the door carefully.

"After what I have seen this evening, Judith, I know what to think. . . . No!—it's no use your denying it." Then in a lower voice, with the flush on her cheeks spreading to her temples, she adds: "Not an hour ago I saw that man Challis. . . ." She pauses on the edge of her indictment.

"You saw that man Challis . . .?"

"I saw that man Challis . . . yes!—I don't care, Judith . . . making love to you in Tophet, with his arm round your waist."

"And where were you?"

"Up here in this room. My hair came down, dancing. And I looked out of that window and *saw* you. Oh, Judith!"

"Oh, Sibyl!" Judith repeats mockingly. She goes to the window with easy deliberation. It is wide open on the summer night, for heat. "Of course one sees Tophet from here," she says. "But how you could distinguish Mr. Challis's arm, or my waist, is a mystery to me, at this distance."

"Have I no eyesight, Judith? I tell you I saw it all, as I stood there where you are now. I saw him set fire to your scarf thing with his cigar. And his arm was round you, and he was looking over your shoulder. I saw it by the blaze-up, as plain as I see you now!"

Judith is undisturbed. "I see you have withdrawn my waist," she says. She circles her diamonded fingers round its girth, and seems not dissatisfied with the span they cannot cover. "But you've got the story wrong, little sister."

"Being offensive won't do you any good."

"You *are* my little sister, Sib dear! And you're a goose. Mr. Challis showed me a letter, and was kind enough to hold a lighted match for me to read it by."

Sibyl makes no reply. Her eyes remain fixed on her sister as she turns a bracelet on her arm uneasily. Evidently she only half believes her. Can she be lying? It is a matter on which a woman

who has never lied before will lie freely. One who has flirted, at such close quarters, with another woman's husband, will tell her sister lies rather than admit it. Sibyl wishes, on the whole, that Judith would look her in the face as she speaks, instead of being so wrapped up in a landscape she knows by heart.

Judith seems inclined to get out of hearing of that subject—has had enough of it. "It seems a shame," she says, "to go to bed on such a heavenly night. But I suppose one must!"

Sibyl is not going to be fubbed off with any such evasions. She has made up her mind, this evening—this is in strict confidence—to accept a peer's son who will be a peer himself when his father ceases to be one, and she is keenly alive to the desirability of avoiding family scandals just at this crisis. If Judith is going to bring a slur on an honourable name, thinks Sibyl, let her do it after my coronet is landed. Her blood is up.

"What was there in the letter?" she says bluntly.

"Sibyl dear, really!" There is amusement in Judith's tone, as of forbearance towards juvenility.

Her sister mocks her. "Yes—*me* dear, really!" she says. "What was there in the letter?"

"May the catechism stop, if I tell you?" The yawn that begins in these words lasts into what follows: "Oh, no, I don't mind telling you, child! There was nothing to make a secret of. It was from his affectionate wife—poor fellow! He really deserves something less dowdy. Let me see, now, how did it run? Her dear Titus—that was it!—she had had another letter from me, pressing her to come. Hadn't written back. Would her dear Titus make me understand that she was too much wanted at home to come away just now? Besides, she did not care for society, as her dear Titus perfectly well knew. She would only be in the way if she did come. It was much better she should have her friends, and he his—spelt wrong: *ei* instead of *ie*. Do you want to know all the rest of the important letter? Very well! She had spent yesterday evening with grandmamma at Pulse Hill, and dear Charlotte was just gone. He was not to hurry back on her account, as it was easier for—some name of a cook—when he was away. He had better stay as long as he could, where he was being amused and flattered. And she was his affectionate wife Marianne. . . . Have *you* been flattering Mr. Titus Scroop, Sibyl dear?"

Sibyl ignored the question. "Tulse Hill, I suppose," said she thoughtfully. "Who's dear Charlotte, I wonder?"

"A Mrs. Eldridge. Nobody you know!"

"I wonder if she's good for dear Marianne." Simple truth must now and then tax credulity, or be excluded from fiction. The whole of the conversation is given above, and where or when on earth Sibyl found in it anything to warrant this wonderment of hers Heaven only knows! However, one can wonder at nothing, oneself, in these days of Marconigraphs. Sibyl ended her speech with, "The woman's as jealous as she can be—one can see that!"

"Can one? . . . oh, I dare say one can, dear! Only she's no concern of mine. Suppose we go to bed."

"If you were Mr. Challis's wife, you might feel just as she does. And if you were not really his wife, it would be all the worse."

"Of course, when one's neither, one doesn't care." This was faulty in construction, yet neither sister felt that it could not be understood.

The hardships of a forgotten casual on the landing outside were recognized with, "Oh dear! Why didn't you go to bed? It's nearly two o'clock." And then sleep came in view, for those who were at home to him.

If Judith said, "Not at home," was it any wonder? Think what an amount of dissimulation she had gone through since that revelation of Challis's in the garden—since what may have been a discovery about herself of something she may have suspected before, but had half-contemptuously dismissed! She may have more than once asked herself the question, "Do I possibly love this man?" and laughed a negative. But oh, the difference it makes when a man has said roundly, "I carry your image in my heart, and cannot be quit of it." She had played with edged tools, and had cut herself. The burn on her shoulder was not the only result of tampering with fire that day, for her. Most surely for her own sake, and his, concealment was the sacramental word, for the moment. She had let him know she was unable to say she did not love him; that was all! But an intent she had half formed in the very core of her heart must be hidden from him. He must have no suspicion that she would lend herself to a scheme that would take advantage of a wretched legal shuffle—one of the most wretched that even Themis has scheduled as a shift for the cancelling of a solemn contract. Was she quite prepared to say she would not, for her own sake, jump at an expedient granted by the solemnity of Law, to make Dishonour seem honourable, and disallow the claims of this stupid, commonplace, would-be wife, who was no wife at all? And who knew it, for that matter.

For this intention had sounded its first note in her heart as she read that postscript, when the last match was all but burned out.

She could remember every word of it, as she paced to and fro in the silence of her bedroom, fostering the idea it suggested. "I suppose you know"—so poor fool Marianne had written, in her momentary fit of spleen and obduracy—"what mamma always says about you and me—that we are not really married at all. If so, I ought to go back and live with her, and the sooner the better. Then you would be free, and I suppose it would be Judith." For that was what the stupid, exasperated woman had actually written, and next morning would have been so glad to plunder the postman's bag of, when he disembowelled the vermilion pillar-box at the corner.

But, as for Judith, her business was to bury the suggestion—which she had read, and Challis had not—in her heart. Had she not a right to hide her cloven foot, if it was one—to wear over it a pretext of her reverence for the bond that linked this man to his dowdy wife, until it broke asunder from its natural rottenness? What was that nauseous saying male man was so fond of? "All's fair in Love!" and what the fœtid interpretations he felt no shame to put upon it? Why was all the selfishness and meanness to belong to one sex alone?

And meanwhile Challis himself was tossing through the fever of a sleepless night, until some wretched sleep was broken by Samuel calling him at 6.30 in the morning, and the hoot of a motor outside. Samuel explained that he had come later than the first time fixed, as his lordship had placed the Panhard at Mr. Challis's disposal, and it would more than make up the time. Challis was grateful.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW LIZARANN AND JOAN PLAYED TRUANT. OF A RIDE IN A MOTOR, AND ITS BAD EFFECTS. HOW LIZARANN CONVALESCED, AND JUDITH WALKED HOME FROM CHURCH WITH THE RECTOR. HOW MARIANNE HAD BOLTED WITH THE TWO CHILDREN

LIZARANN was, of course, the patient Mr. Taylor spoke of. But it was all her own fault, said Public Opinion, that she had such a bad inflammatory cold. If she and Joan had been good, obedient children, and done as they were told when they came home from the tea-party at Royd, instead of giving Aunt Bessy the slip and running away to Daddy at Mrs. Forks's cottage, all would have been well. But be lenient to Lizarann! It was all through her anxiety that old Christopher should have his bicarbonate of soda. Her anxiety on his behalf was great, although she did not know him personally.

"Maten't Phœbe and Jones go round to old Mrs. Forks, where Daddy is, and bring it screwed up in piper like acrost the road to Mr. Curtis's?" So Lizarann had said—for she really believed that Joan's name was one and the same with that of the Wash, in Cazenove Street—and Aunt Bessy's negative had been emphatic.

"Certainly *not,* my dear! At this time of the evening! Why, it's past six o'clock. . . . Yes, you and Joan may run on in front, only don't get over the gate till I come. The gate of the next field, you know." But when Aunt Bessy and Phœbe reached that gate—where were Lizarann and Joan? The wicked imps had gone to Mrs. Forks's.

The worst of it was that when the Rector had personally recaptured the truants, and was taking them home, a motor-car, with a lady and gentleman in it, passed them, going at speed. That, as they escaped alive, was no harm. But, having passed, it stopped, and something disagreed with it all through the colloquy that followed.

"Isn't that Mr. Taylor? Can't we give you a lift?"

"You're going the wrong way. And we're too numerous."

"Nonsense! Any amount of room! And it won't take us three minutes to run you back to the Rectory. Jump in."

The Rector hesitated a moment. It was just on to dinner-time

at the Hall, and it seemed a shame to make this lady and gentleman late. But Lizarann was coughing again. It may have been the petrol, but still——! Then, too, Aunt Bessy's anxiety would be over all the sooner. And there were those children almost frantic with delight at the idea of a ride in a motor!

So he agreed. And it *was* fun! Only there were two drawbacks —one, that it was over so soon; the other, that no sooner were they deposited at the Rectory gate, and the lady and gentleman in the motor off at great speed to be in time for dinner, than Lizarann had such a terrible attack of coughing that Miss Caldecott and her brother-in-law were quite alarmed.

The report the Rector gave to Lady Arkroyd was too sanguine. Bad inflammatory colds don't yield to treatment in a couple of hours, which was about how long it had been at work by the time he and Aunt Bessy drove away to the Hall, to come in after dinner, having been forced to cry off, with apology and explanation, owing to the escapade of the children.

Lizarann's didn't yield to treatment for many days, and during that period was a serious source of alarm to all her circle of friends at the Rectory, and a frequent subject of inquiry by interested outsiders. For the little maid had a happy faculty of remaining in the memory of chance acquaintances. Also, it was generally understood in the neighbourhood that she was a delicate *protégée* of the Rector's friend's sister, Adeline Fossett, and had been sent away from town to get the benefit of the air at Royd. So Lizarann got quite her fair share of public interest.

But her attack must have been a sharp one, or we may rely upon it she wouldn't have been kept in bed next day, and more days after next day. And Dr. Sidrophel—it wasn't his real name, mind you!—wouldn't have said, as he did till Lizarann really felt quite sick of hearing it, that it would be as well to continue the poultices, for the present, as a precaution. Her own view, to be sure, was that inflammation was the result of mustard poultices and stethoscopes primarily, and that it was bound to get worse if you had to put a glass tube in your mouth at the bidding of well-meaning friends. But she concealed these convictions in deference to public opinion, and did everything she was told to do, however gross the infatuation might be that instituted the obnoxious treatment. Her conviction that she had, intrinsically, nothing the matter with her was, however, not one to be shaken lightly. She went so far once as to say so to Dr. Pordage—that *was* his real name!—who replied, "Oh ah, that's it, is it? Nothing the matter! But you *will* have, if you don't look alive, as safe as a but-

ton! So there we are, little miss!"—but absently, as though she was a child and wouldn't understand him—and blotted the prescription he had been writing. But Lizarann heard every word, and resolved to look alive, so far as in her lay, whenever an opportunity came. Meanwhile, none being manifest, she reflected a good deal on buttons, wondering what was the nature of the security they tendered, and why she had never heard it before.

When Mr. Yorick—the name she preferred for the Rector, because, you see, Miss Fossett must know best—came to pay her a visit shortly after, she inquired on this point, giving the whole of the doctor's speech, and making herself cough. Now, Mr. Yorick always talked to Lizarann as if she was a sensible person; and if there was one attribute for which the child loved him more dearly than another, it was that. But her devotion to him was so complete—second only to her love for her Daddy—that analysis of it was absurd.

"Was he talking to you, or talking to himself, Lizarann?" said he, sitting by the bed with the patient's hand in his. It was small and feverish.

The reply called for reflection. Having thought well over it, Lizarann said decisively: "Bofe!"

"Was he writing all the while?"

"Yass!" Nods helped the emphasis. "All the while! Scritch-scratch!"

"That was it, Lizarann! Dr. Sidrophel can't write and hear what he says to himself at the same time. So nobody knows what he means." But the little woman's great eyes were full of doubtful inquiry, and more must be said. "I expect he only meant that if you went out in the air you would get your cough back. So you must just look alive and lie in bed." It was plausible, and would have to do for the present. The button question might stand over.

"Mustn't I go and see Daddy where Mrs. Forks is?"

"Yes, in a little while. Daddy will come and see you every day."

"And bring his crutches to come upstairs with?"

"Daddy left his crutches here yesterday. To be ready for him whenever he comes."

"And not tear a hole in the drugget?"

"Not if he goes gently and I put my hand on his back!"

"Which hand?"

"This one I've got hold of you with, Miss Coupland! Any more questions?"

Lizarann pursed up her lips and shook her head. But she reconsidered her decision. "Yass! About Dr. Side—Dr. Side . . ."

"Dr. Sidrophel? What about him?"

"Why's his real nime Pordage?" She had the name very pat, showing close observation and reflection.

Mr. Yorick had to consider the point. "Well!" said he presently, "I admit it's rather a bad job. But there's no way out of it now. It *is* his real name, and that's all about it!" But Lizarann looked dissatisfied. "*We* may call him Dr. Sidrophel behind his back, Lizarann," added he.

"Supposing he was to hear us talking behind his back, and was to listen behind his back . . .!" Hypothetical knavery being admitted between these two, as a necessity in ingenious fictions, Mr. Yorick did not think a homily on truth-telling necessary at this point. In fact, he counselled bold duplicity, to Lizarann's great relief. "We should have to go far enough off, Lizarann," said he. And the stage direction indicated was so pleasant to her unfledged mind that she utilized it to develope the subject further—kept the curtain up, as it were!

"Then if we wentited far enough off, you could tell me why his nime was Dr. Spiderophel, too." She dashed intrepidly at the name, and nearly captured it.

"Of course I could, and he wouldn't hear one word."

"And what should you sye?" Lizarann gave a slight leap in bed, from pleasant anticipation. She was told to lie quiet, and she should hear.

And that is how it was that when Miss Caldecott came in, dressed *cap-à-pie* for public worship, a prayer-book in a gloved hand—for it was Sunday morning—to remind her brother-in-law that the bells were going to begin, and arouse him to his duties, she found him telling how Sidrophel was an astronomer who took a fly in his telescope for an elephant on the moon; and that this legend was only partly cleared up by its narrator. Telescopes and stethoscopes remained imperfectly differentiated in Lizarann's mind. And Mr. Yorick's temporary acceptance of her pronunciation led to a misapprehension about spiders and flies. Did this astronomer catch that fly, or did the fly get away? Lizarann treasured hopes on its behalf, for the next chapter in the story.

But she felt it her duty to look alive, and lie quite quiet in bed, although—law bless you!—*she* had nothing the matter with her. So she lay and watched a greedy bee, who seemed bent on leaving no honey in that jessamine, at any rate, that came across the open

lattice, and had its say in the mixed scents of hay and roses that came in out of the sunshine for Lizarann to get her share of them. She lay and listened to the bells, and wondered why the sound rose and fell, and decided at first that it was done for the purpose, and was the right way. But then, how did Nonconformity afar manage to do it so exactly like? For the Chapel tinkle rose and fell, too. Then came the footsteps on the garden-gravel; one big one, the Rector's, and many small ones. And Lizarann was so sorry she wasn't to go to Church, where it was her Sunday-wont, in these days, to drive a coach-and-six through the first Commandment, and worship Athelstan Taylor on his pulpit-altar in a heart-felt way, while admitting official obligations elsewhere.

But she couldn't go this time, and, what was more, she had to go on looking alive and lying quiet while Phœbe and Joan shouted good-byes up at the window, as though they were off to New Zealand; because, you see, Lizarann had solemnly promised, if they did so, not to shout back and make herself cough.

"She hardly coughed at all when I was with her," said the Rector, on his way to his weekly *pièce de résistance*—his Sunday sermon. "I can't help thinking Dr. Sidrophel may be making his fly out an elephant this time."

"Perhaps, dear! But the fly may become an elephant. He's really very clever, although you do make such game of him. You see, he was quite right about poor Gus."

"Ah, dear, dear!—yes. But then he says, if Gus got into a better climate, he might make old bones yet."

"So Gus will, by God's mercy, dear! But I mean, Dr. Pordage said—and I do not see that I am bound to call him out of his name—that in the end Gus would have to give in, and go. You see, he was right! Joan!"

"Yes, aunty darling!"

"Don't turn your toes in and out, and whistle. It's not at all lady-like, and there's Mrs. Theophilus Silverton just behind in the pony-carriage." Joan toned her behaviour down to meet the prejudices of local society. "You *do* see, don't you, that Dr. Pordage *was* right?" For this good lady wouldn't *glisser,* and always *appuyait* until her accuracy had been entered on the minutes. Her brother-in-law said, "Quite right, aunty!" And she said, "Very well, then!" and seemed to find the fact that she was right almost a set-off against the painful fact she was right about.

For Dr. Sidrophel's shrewd forecast about the Rev. Augustus Fossett meant exile for that invalid; and this exile had already

taken form in the proposal that Gus should accept a chaplaincy of an English church in Tunis, which had been offered to him. Athelstan Taylor was keen on his acceptance of the post; as he would have been on the amputation of his own right hand, if he had seen therein any benefit for his friend. But his face went very sad over it as he walked on in silence.

His mind was back in old Eton and Oxford days, when they were all young together—Gus and his sister Adeline, and he, and the mother of those two youngsters in front, who were being so decorous, pending the approach of the pony-chariot behind. And this semi-sister of his own, beside him now, who was always a sort of thorn in the Rector's innermost conscience. For hadn't she—or had she—foregone wedlock and babes of her own for the sake of her sister's and his? The sort of thing no one could ever really know! And what would happen if this confounded Deceased Wife's Sister bill were to become law? That was the *cul-de-sac* these explorations often led him to, more and more as the chances increased of a majority for the Bill in the House of Peers. But it *was* a *cul-de-sac*. Why think about it? Was not each day's evil sufficient for it, and something over?

The pony-carriage gained and gained—overhauled the pedestrians—underwent a period of rapture that it should absolutely see them alive in the flesh—and forged ahead unfeelingly. But it had not expelled from the Rector's mind a something that it had met with in that *cul-de-sac*—what was it?—oh yes, he knew!

"That's a very sad business, I'm afraid, of poor Challis's."

But Miss Caldecott cannot honour this remark immediately. Deportment calls for attention. "You're not to begin again, the minute they're out of sight, Joan. . . . What business, dear?"

"I thought you knew about it?"

"No, I know nothing. Only what Lady Arkroyd said."

"Exactly! Well—it's a very painful affair."

"No doubt, dear! Phœbe, don't hunch your shoulders."

"Come, Bess, be a little sorry for the poor chap! I don't believe it's *his* fault."

"Oh, I dare say not! I know nothing about it. And I don't want to know anything about people of that sort."

"What sort?"

"You know what I mean, Athel. Literary, freethinking sort of people. Them and their wives!"

"I know quite well what you mean, Bess." As Athelstan does know, he says so honestly, instead of allowing his sister-in-law to attempt to explain her meaning, which he is well aware she cannot.

"But tell me again what Lady Arkroyd said about Challis and his wife."

"Just what I told you."

"Which was . . . ?"

"That they had quarrelled, and she had gone away to her mother. The day after he went back."

"Was that all?"

"Yes—I think so! Yes, there was nothing else."

"How came Lady Arkroyd to know?"

The lady becomes suddenly explicit. "My dear, it's, no, use, your, catechizing *me!* For I tell you I know nothing about it! You must ask Lady Arkroyd yourself. There they are!" Meaning that carriage-wheels are audible, identifiable as the Hall coming to Church.

And then the Rector had to mind his *ps* and *qs*. For he hadn't so much as thought of the text he should preach on.

However, he acquitted himself well, as he had done a hundred times under analogous circumstances. And then, as soon as he felt at liberty to be secular, his mind went back to the profane author's domestic affairs.

"My dear Lady Arkroyd, what's this about our friend Challis and his wife?"

The Baronet, who is close by—for he is a punctual churchgoer: it is feudal—says, informedly, "A row in that quarter!" nods sagaciously, and contains further information in closed lips. Her ladyship supposes it's the usual thing; need we know anything about it? She dimisses nuptial quarrels, presumably resulting from infidelities, with graceful languor; perhaps reserving such as are within the pale, sanctioned by titles. Judith, with the most perfect self-command, immovably graceful, says sweetly: "Is there a *row* between Mr. and Mrs. Challis?" On which her mother suddenly becomes petulant and human—comes down from Olympus as it were—exclaiming: "Why, Ju, you know you told me so yourself, child!—what nonsense!"

"Perhaps I used the wrong word," says Ju, undisturbed. "Have we any business with Mr. and Mrs. Challis's private affairs?"

"None at all, my dear! Jump in: you're keeping the horses." Her ladyship is in the carriage already, and will have no objection to driving away from Mr. and Mrs. Challis's private affairs. It was just like dear Mr. Taylor to begin talking about them, with everyone about.

But Judith has another scheme. She is going to walk, thank you! Miss Caldecott and Phœbe and Joan may do the jumping

in, and the carriage may drop them at the Rectory. Oh, very well!—if Miss Arkroyd really wants to walk. All settled. Only Joan puts in a demurrer; she means to walk with papa, and he will carry her on his shoulder. Joan is an anti-Sabbatarian of an advanced school, and often makes her father as bad as herself.

The Rectory is not really on the way to the Hall, but Judith's short cut to the latter is not far out of it for Joan and her manservant, or ox, or ass—whichever is nearest—who ought to be doing no labour on this day. So, as soon as the Rector escapes from the small-talk of many parishioners on the road, and turns into the field path, Judith can effect an end she has in view. It was none of *her* doing, mind you!—this was the substance of her exordium—it was entirely mamma. What she referred to, after many minutes in abeyance, had revived the moment the last parishioner died away. But the Rector disallowed her line of pleading.

"Come, I say now, Judith!" He Christian-names the daughters of the Hall when alone with them, having known them as children. "Draw it mild! You must have told your *madre* something. Of course you did!"

"Yes. I was obliged to. But Mr. Challis did not mean me to. It was very difficult not to say something about what was in the letter. . . ."

"From Mr. Challis?"

"Yes. Mamma knows his handwriting, and asked me what was in it. It was too long for me to say—nothing! So I told her what I knew she must hear afterwards, but begged her to say nothing about it."

"And then she told Bess?"

"I'm extremely sorry to have to turn and rend my mother—especially coming from Church—but you see she has her idiosyncrasies, the *madre*. I assure you, dear Mr. Taylor, she actually went straight to Miss Caldecott, and said with the most unblushing effrontery that she had promised not to tell anyone, but that she knew she might do so safely to anyone so discreet, and then repeated what I had said to her, with additions. She is a trying mother sometimes!"

"And then Bess comes and tells me! You're a nice lot of *confidantes*. . . ." Something in Judith's look checks his joking tone as he glances round at her, and he says, "What?" And then, "Yes—go on!" Then a hesitation leaves her, and she speaks:

"I will tell you more than I told mamma, Mr. Taylor. I wish to, because I think your advice would be good. Mr. Challis wrote

to me—a long letter—we are friends, you know; I have seen a good deal of him. . . ."

"Quite right! I like Challis, you know."

"So do I;—though he might smoke less. However, we're none of us perfect. . . . Well!—I'm sorry to say the story is true. He fell out with Marianne—his wife is Marianne—the day after he arrived at home, although she had received him cordially enough on his arrival. She was at her mother's when he arrived, but came back to dinner. In the course of the evening they quarrelled, but I gathered from his letter that he thought it would blow over. Next morning they were civil to one another, but short of reconciliation. She went out in the morning, and in the afternoon he went away to a club-dinner. When he came back, quite late, he found a note from her, saying that she had gone away again to her mother's, and had taken her children with her."

"Good God!" The Rector's voice is a shocked undertone. "Was that Bob, and the two little girls . . .? Oh yes!—he told me a good deal of his family."

"Not Bob; he's at school. The others are her own children; he isn't."

"I never was more shocked in my life. . . . Yes!—Joanikin. You'd better get down and walk a bit. There we are, all alive and kicking!" Joan is deposited on the ground, her legs in evidence. "But do tell me!—'took away her children with her'! She *can't,* legally."

"She has done it illegally, I presume." Judith is very equable over this point. "She has done it actually, anyhow!"

"*What* an extraordinary thing!" The Rector cannot get over it.

"Well!—it's true! He came back from his club, poor man, to find his house empty and his children gone. And no explanation but the note. He roused up the servants that were left, a cook named Steptoe and the housemaid, who said their mistress and the nurse and children had packed a few things and gone away in a cab with a friend, about an hour after he left."

"It seems almost incredible—at first." He has to walk on a little way, fanning himself with his bandana handkerchief, before he can settle down from his amazement, and try for enlightening details. At last he says: "And then he wrote to you—when? Next day?"

"He left us, you remember, on Tuesday. His letter is dated Tuesday. The Tuesday after. Just a week."

"Would you object to my seeing it?"

"*I* should not. Why should I? But I fancy he did not wish anyone else to see it. I could tell you what there was in it, just as well. And then, dear Mr. Taylor, you will see why he wrote at such length to me about it. You must be wondering."

"I was."

"It was simply this. . . . By-the-bye, I dare say you heard how he set me on fire—that night we had the dance? . . . No? . . . Well, it was all connected with that. You know this Marianne of his would keep on refusing to come and see us, and I asked him to show me her letter with a message to me in it. We were out in our little Tophet garden, and it was too dark to read it. I thought one could read by moonlight, or I wouldn't have asked for it. Mr. Challis lighted a vesta for me to read by, and set me on fire . . . well—yes—I was just a little burned, on this shoulder. The worst of it was, her letter caught fire, and was burned to a cinder."

"But what harm did that do? She didn't want it back."

"No, she didn't. But there were two or three words on the back he hadn't read, and I couldn't tell him what they were. It seems she was surprised at his making no reference to them; and since he told me in his letter what he surmises they were, I can't say I wonder. *I* should have been."

"What were they? Or what does he suppose them to have been?"

"He might not like me to say, because she can never have meant them to be seen. It doesn't matter what they were. . . ."

"Certainly, certainly! I quite understand."

"If he had known of them, he would have refused to show me the letter. As it turned out, it was most unfortunate. Because he said nothing except that he had given me her message to read. . . ." Judith faltered—was coming to the difficult part.

"'Message to read,'" said the Rector connectively. "Yes?"

"Had given me her message to read, and had said nothing about when or where or how. And then the poor man had to account for the burning of the letter before he saw these words on the back . . . oh yes!—of course, one ought always to tell the whole truth in a fix; I know that. But she had only his word for it that he had read the letter before and overlooked the postscript. Of course, what *she* thought was that her good gentleman was allowing a strange young lady—who isn't very popular with her—to open her confidential letters, and let him read them over her shoulder. *Now* do you appreciate the position, Rector?" Probably this young lady was very glad that this way of accounting for

Mrs. Challis's resentment franked her of referring to the possible effect on a jealous wife's imagination of the loneliness of Tophet and the moonlight, both of which were *sine qua non* to a true account of the conflagration. Surmises about Challis's passionate outburst were not to be encouraged by reference to any of the surroundings that provoked them. Let them be ignored, "sequin net"—which is not expensive, but deadly in the moonlight—and all!

So unsuspicious was Athelstan Taylor of the inner soul of a thorough-paced flirt that he thought he might indulge in a little subcutaneous paternal amusement, as of wider experience, at this young lady's seeming innocence of the constructions Mrs. Challis might attach to details of the story told in full. He nodded assent to his own insight. Oh yes!—he appreciated the position thoroughly; Judith might be sure of that!—and points below the surface as well. But these belonged to a part of the drama altogether of minor importance, seeing how foregone a conclusion it was that no such thing as flirtation between a daughter of the Hall and a stray scribbler was possible. The fact that Challis had quarrelled with his wife was on another footing altogether. May there not have been some other cause?

"Challis puts his wife's resentment down *entirely* to this matter of the opening of the letter?" The Rector's question comes after cogitation.

"Ye-es!—entirely, this time."

"H'm!—have there been other times?"

"He does not say so. That is not quite what I meant. I should have said that she seems to have accused him of untruthfulness before, or at least hinted at it. I don't gather that there has ever been a rupture between them. Don't let's walk fast, or we shall be back before I've told you what *I* am in it—I mean, what Mr. Challis wants me to do."

"I can come a little way on with you . . . why, of course, he wants you to write to his wife and confirm his version of this picturesque event. That's it, isn't it?"

"That's it. But what use will it be?"

Now for all Athelstan Taylor's superior insight into the world and its ways, it had not so far presented itself to him that a letter from Miss Arkroyd to Mrs. Challis on this subject might be like a red rag to a bull. It crossed his mind now, and kept him silent until Judith repeated: "What use will it be?" Then he replied uneasily: "Do you know?—I don't feel the ground firm under my feet. I shouldn't like to advise off-hand. What does your mother think?"

"Oh, I haven't talked to mamma, beyond what I told you. You see—she's dear, of course; but she's a sieve. And these are Mr. Challis's affairs, not mine . . . oh no!—I *know* he wouldn't mind my talking to you about them."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I *know!* He would like me to talk to you, I'm certain."

"Would you mind talking to Bess about it? She's very sensible."

"I don't think Mr. Challis would like it. I am sure he would not mind you."

The Rector admitted this was possible, in his inner conscience. But he would make another suggestion: "Why not ask Addie what *she* thinks? She's coming to-morrow, on a visit to Lizarann."

"How is the little girl?"

"Getting on like a house on fire. But you will ask Addie? You needn't answer his letter yet, you know. At least, you needn't write to Mrs. Challis."

"Miss Fossett? Isn't she, though—isn't she somehow some sort of connection of Mrs. Challis?"

"Is she?"

"Or isn't it? . . . Oh, I know—it was a cousin of hers I met at the play. Mr. Challis hates her—the cousin. *I* didn't dislike her."

"She might know something. . . ."

"I don't think Miss Fossett would see much of this—Mrs. Partridge, I think the name was. But Mrs. Partridge and Marianne are bosom-friends. So it might be worth . . ." She interrupted herself. "Only isn't Miss Fossett . . .?"

"Isn't she what?"

"Well, then, doesn't she feel very strongly on the Deceased Wife's Sister question?"

"What would that have to do with it?"

"You know he married his deceased wife's sister?"

"Eh?" said the Rector. "So he did." And then, thoughtfully: "I see—I see—I *think* I see."

"See what?"

"The reason why she took her children away. She thinks they are hers legally—thinks she has a right to them."

Judith evidently did not see the point involved, and the Rector had to explain that the children of an unmarried woman belong legally to their mother, and that probably Marianne, not being Challis's wife according to the law of the land, had imagined that her right to possession of them could be maintained in a law-court.

"But surely—it could!" said Judith.

"Ah, my dear young lady!"—was the answer—"little you know the amazing resources of legislation for deciding that the weaker party is in the wrong!"

But Judith did not want the conversation to become a review of the iniquities of Law, a subject on which she knew Athelstan Taylor was given to being in revolt against constituted authority. So she brought him back to the real issue before the house.

"You haven't told me what you think I ought to write, Mr. Taylor. Please don't send me away to ask somebody else!—that's such very cold comfort. Give me real advice. What can I say?"

It took a little time to decide, but was clear when it came. "The question, I take it, isn't whether the letter will do any good. I tell you honestly, I don't think it will. But Challis asks you to write, and that settles the matter. Well!—say you write at his request, and that he asks you to write exactly what happened. Do it as literally as possible."

"Say anything about how grieved I am—painful circumstances—hope to hear misunderstanding completely removed—anything of that sort?"

"Oh no!—no, on the whole, certainly not! Better keep off that as much as possible!"

"Won't it be rather like . . . snuffing poor Mrs. Challis out, if I don't end up somehow?"

"Hm—well! Suppose we go so far as to hope this will help to remove . . . to remove . . . what seems a perfectly groundless misunderstanding. Stop it at that. Quite enough! And I say, Judith, look here! In writing to Mrs. Challis, don't you go and show that you've heard particulars of the row. Stick to the explanation of the letter-business. Don't on any account show you know she has left her home, or that he has told about it."

"Won't that be what Mr. Tomes calls *suppressio veri?*"

"Tut—tut! If it is, not sending the letter at all will be *suppressio* of still more *veri.* You stick to what Challis asks for, and let him be responsible. Married couples, when they quarrel, are kittle cattle to shoe behind. Now we must say good-bye, or one of us will be late for lunch."

They had overshot the point at which the path diverged to the Rectory, and it was time to hark back. But before Judith was out of hearing the Rector called after her.

"Tell poor Challis I'm writing to him. I shall go and see him when I get up to town—some time next week. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

CHALLIS'S INSIPID RETURN HOME. WHAT HAD IT ALL BEEN, THIS DREAM? OLD LINKS WITH BYGONES. HOW CONFESS, AND TO WHAT? OF A FIRE GOD GAVE FOR OTHER ENDS

Mr. Challis gave Lord Felixthorpe's chauffeur half-a-sovereign when he was landed at the Station. This was because he stood in such awe of that great man that he doubted if so haughty a soul would brook a tip at all. However, it not only brooked it, but changed it immediately for nine shillings in silver and eightpence in coppers and a glass of bitters at the Barleymow, opposite the Station. So Challis felt easy, and wondered to himself that so small a matter should disquiet him, with all his great perplexities on hand. How on earth did Napoleon Bonaparte contrive to exist?

However, all the perplexities came back in force as soon as he was off; indeed, he was almost sorry no small distraction occurred during his flight home. For he was alone nearly all the way to Euston; the many who nearly entered his carriage seeming to condemn him on inspection, and choosing every other carriage on its merits. The porter who put his valise on a cab at the terminus seemed callous and preoccupied; and the driver, when told to go to the nearest Metropolitan Station, struck him as too unsympathetic when he said: "Which will you have—King's Cross or Gower Street? It don't make no difference to *me*," not without some imputation of weakness of character. Also, this cabman appeared to form a lower opinion of his fare when the latter chose Gower Street than he would have had he chosen King's Cross.

By the time Challis had described a large segment of the Inner Circle, and had waited a quarter of an hour at Gloucester Road for a Wimbledon train, he had resolved that nothing would ever induce him to try that route again. Then a distasteful thought struck him:—should he ever make the same journey again? "Much better not," said he to himself; and kept on repeating it to himself till he had found his seat in the Wimbledon train, the gear of which caught the phrase, and seemed to repeat it to itself all the way to East Putney.

He had wired to Marianne: "Am coming home on business may come to lunch but don't wait Titus." The "may come to lunch" struck him as making this "business" seem plausible, without definite disingenuousness. He wanted to account for himself, and to make his sudden return a very matter-of-course occurrence. One thing was odd about it—and it was odder still that it never struck him as odd—that he should be so solicitous about not giving his wife an unnecessary start. He was just what he had always been in respect of his constant consideration of Marianne's comfort in small matters, and had never admitted to himself that his affection for her had varied as a necessary result of his infatuation for Judith. Had it done so, of necessity? It may not have—or it may. Psychological problems need not occupy a narrative of facts. This is one that might easily land us in an attempt to formulate an exact Definition of Love. Better beware in time! Leave the question in a condition of Metaphysical Equilibrium.

How Challis would have welcomed, just at this turning-point of his relations with Marianne—scouting as he did the idea of a rupture, so far—a thorough heart-whole *accolade* at the front garden-gate of the Hermitage! What an all-important factor in the moulding of the days to come would have been an unqualified, unmitigated, unreserved embrace—even before the cabman! Such a one as Penelope would have given Ulysses, if he had come back recognizable: a greeting to send the memories of all Calypsoes flying like chaff before the wind! Yes—even the appearance of Penelope on the threshold, revealing that Ulysses was just in time for lunch, only he must make haste, as it had been kept back to the very last minute, and he must keep all his news till afterwards. Any little thing of this sort—a note, spelt anyhow—a scribble on the slate in the hall, where you can write messages if there's a pencil—the slightest tradition of a consciousness of tea-to-come on the part of the departed, when departing—even a caution that you are not to spill, because it's a clean tablecloth—*anything*, in fact, rather than the dull, neglected, flat reality of Challis's return!

Remembering how his last arrival at home had fallen through, he had organized a surprise in his own mind. He had so light a valise this time—one carries less wardrobe in hot weather—that it would be no encumbrance. He would discharge his cab, and let himself in with his latchkey.

The cabman's expression was one of dissatisfaction with his career, but acquiescence in fifty-per-cent. beyond the tariff. He

said it was coming on a drizzle, and drove away. Then Challis had to give up the surprise. For the garden-gate was shut to and locked—"because of the boys," no doubt—and he had to ring. He kept his finger on the electric bell, to show that his mind was made up as to coming in; whereupon Harmood appeared bearing a key. Challis did not complain that she had not kissed him, but he did think she might have been warmer.

"Mrs. Challis never said, sir," was her brief testimony in reply to "Where was your mistress going?" The uncompromising roughness of "your mistress" may have widened the gulf between them. A suggestion that perhaps Mrs. Steptoe knew was met by the concession, "I could ask Mrs. Steptoe." Delay then resulted, as Mrs. Steptoe, though absolutely in ignorance, wished to produce a sort of meretricious effect of giving information, and had to make talk while she thought out spurious data.

"No, sir, I couldn't say Mrs. Challis ever said a word to me, not this morning. Not if you was to ask. But yesterday morning she did say, 'ash what there was of the chicken, and stew the scrag-end of the neck for the kitchen-dinner to-day. . . ."

"Well!—and did she say where she was going? That's the point."

"I was coming to that, sir!" Mrs. Steptoe was reproachful. "The scrag-end of the neck for the kitchen-dinner to-day, because she might be going to Tulse Hill. And the young ladies would certainly be going to Mrs. Eldridge's all day. And this morning she says to me to have a piece of rump-steak in the house in case."

"In case I came." But Mrs. Steptoe had intended a complete sentence. Challis concluded: "That's where she's gone, I expect! And the children are away?"

"The young ladies, sir." Thus Harmood, the stickler for the proprieties. To whom Challis says, "Very well!—Get me some lunch—steak—anything!" and goes to his room to wash, leaving Mrs. Steptoe recapitulating.

Was ever a blanker home-coming? Challis began to suspect he would certainly make hay of his life, unless some *deus ex machina* came into it. Was he a *dignus vindice nodus*? He put the question aside to read accumulated letters, kept back by request. Then lunch was on table, and life seemed suddenly as usual. But no Marianne, so far!

The drizzle "it" had "come on" made a dreary outlook from the house, and a sense of the absence of the children a conscious

cause of dreariness within. No consolation could be found in the distant voices of the two servants at loggerheads in the basement. "Probably one specific loggerhead," thought Challis, as he gave real thought and care to the filling of a pipe he meant to enjoy. Because a certain incisive repetition, which seemed to relate to the same theme, conveyed the idea of diametrically opposed opinions, intemperately advocated by street-door knocks. A lull would come when Harmood brought him a cup of coffee—fresh-made, he hoped—and he would then hint broadly that the discussion was needlessly audible. "Keep the kitchen-door shut" is the usual formula.

The coffee came. It was ower good for banning and ower bad for blessing, like Rob Roy; only certainly not so strong. So thought Challis to himself—all such thoughts are his, not the story's—as he submitted to it. But he found a satisfaction for the ban he had withheld, in an increased acerbity of manner in his allusion to the kitchen-door. He called it out to Harmood as she departed, having sipped the coffee in the interim. "Yes, sir," said Harmood, speaking as though butter would not melt in her mouth.

However, the kitchen-door closed, and the discussion went on as though both the knockers' families had had a baby. It would not interfere with the pipe.

What was all this that had happened? He found himself asking space this, as he watched the smoke curling away, and changing to the smell he meant to let out of the window before Marianne came back. Now that he was here again, in his old surroundings, he could live back into them, and think of that intoxication of last night—only last night!—as nothing but a strange, bewitching dream. Never was man more susceptible to surroundings than Challis. Turn where he might, some trifle or other brought back his old days to him.

There, upon the chimney-piece, in defiance of modern taste, were certain treasures that had never found a place on a dust-heap because of their various associations with "poor Kate." The parian candlesticks at either end—religiously mended whenever chipped, and one of them obliged to submit to a rivet—did he and Kate not buy them in Oxford Street, and were they not therefore precious? The Swiss haymakers, carved in wood, that were an early present of Marianne's to her sister, were they not—although, of course, they were not high art, and you might sneer at them—things Kate had valued, and on that account never to be discarded or forgotten? The ingenious ship under a glass cover, with

chenille round its base, whose hull was muscle-shells, and whose rigging spun glass, was it not a precious inheritance of past ages, treasured with curses, because every time it was moved it tumbled over, and had to be taken from its shelter and made the subject of unskilful experiments with sealing-wax and gum-arabic? Each had its tale of a former time. And everything that said a word about Kate added a postscript about her sister.

Was it not as well that last night's folly or delirium should rank as a dream?—was it not best? If only Destiny could have become a visible Rhadamanthus and driven the nail home, saying, "Now that's settled, Mr. Challis, and you are not to see Miss Arkroyd of Royd again," and he could have believed all his experiences of the last eight months hallucinations! But he could not do so without a warranty, and a strong one. He happened to know that Royd Hall was still there, in Rankshire; and that a week-end ticket was sixteen and sixpence. Let him try to make a dream of that, with Bradshaw ready to rise in evidence and denounce him! He could not but fail, with all the facts against him, in an attempt to quench his memories; but the more dream-like and unreal they seemed to him, the less guilty he felt of duplicity towards Marianne. Other men might not have felt so; but this is his story, and we must take him as we find him.

Would any other man in like case have fashioned, as he did, the rough-hewn incidents of a scene in which he should make a clean breast of the whole tormenting dream to his wife, get absolution, and be once more his natural self, with no reserves? How on earth should he set about it? that was the thought that started it. Suppose he succeeded in saying, "Polly Anne, I'm a bad, wicked man, and I've been making love to Judith Arkroyd, and forgetting my duty to the wife of my bosom and her kids," would Marianne know what would be a correct attitude for an injured matron under her circumstances? Would she be able to say, perjured and forsworn and betrayer, and hence!—ere she did some correct thing or other? Not she! But suppose instead she were to say, "Just one minute, till I've done with Harmood, and I shall be able to listen to you. . . . Now, what is it?" what on earth would he do then with the position? Say it all over again, or try a variation, "You see before you a guilty *et cetera*," or something of that sort? No, no!—that would never do. Why, part of the awkwardness of the position was that the word *guilty* would overweight the confession so terribly. None of the substantial conditions of broken marriage-vows had been complied with, and it really would be difficult to know exactly what to con-

fess to. How could he know that Charlotte Eldridge—for, dramatist that he was, he knew that lady down to the ground!—would not have dismissed the case with, "You see, my dear, there really hadn't *been* anything!"

And all the while the worst of it was that, according to his own canon of morals, there had been *everything*. He had profaned the temple of Love, soiled the marble floor, torn some chaplet from the altar; done something, no matter what, that was making him a secret-keeper from his wife; that would make him flinch from her gaze. Were other men all like that? No, certainly not! But then, they were not milksops, but Men of the World. Also, they worshipped at another temple, down the road, those merry satyrs; a temple where Pan and Silenus had altars.

No doubt this analysis of his own case, that Challis makes as he gets on with that pipe—near its end now—and waits to hear his wife's cab at the gate, would have clashed a good deal with his seeming reckless speech among men; speech he was apt to get himself a very bad name by, among precisians! But he was made up of oddities and paradoxes. Is any light thrown on him by what he is reported to have once said: "I can't see that it can matter how many wives—or whatever you like to call them—a man has, if he doesn't care twopence about any of them, and they all know it"? The funny part of this creed of Challis's about marriage and his fellow-men was that it caused them to ascribe to *him* precisely the same morals that he had ascribed to *them*, and that each one of them, whenever he chanced to speak of it in confidence to anyone he was not on his guard against, always appeared to disclaim attendance at the temple down the road for himself, personally; and, in fact, to suggest that he, exceptionally, had common decency in a corner somewhere.

No man will ever know—one may say that much safely—how far any other man is like himself. He is pretty sure to invent a curious monster for his fellow-man to be, based on all his own worst propensities; but utterly ignoring that mysterious impulse to fight against them which he has the egotism to call his better self. He credits himself, personally, with an inherent dislike of evil, and conceives that his fellow-man is kept in check by the Decalogue. He ascribes Original Sin to the race, and credits himself secretly with a monopoly of Original Virtue.

But it is unfair to go on moralizing in this way, merely because Marianne does not come back. The justification is that Challis spent such a long time in useless self-torment over his position; he all the while believing quite sincerely that real men of the

world—say, broadly speaking, Mr. Brown and Lord Smith—practised double-dealers that they were in all that relates to womankind, would have dismissed the whole matter with an experienced smile. In the course of an hour, however, he endeavored to imitate the spirited demeanour of Mr. Brown and Lord Smith, and went away to his room to write.

He had to acknowledge that he could not fix his attention as Mr. Brown and Lord Smith would have done; but he made a fair show of writing, too—felt he had got to work again! Marianne would be back to tea; he was glad of that. He was distinctly not at all sorry to find he was glad of that. But he was a little annoyed that it had occurred to him to make the discovery—that he had not left the question dormant.

The noise in the kitchen below was almost inaudible in Challis's room, but a sense hung about of the remains of an engagement elsewhere. Challis was conscious that a dropping fire stopped when he rang the bell at four-thirty, to tell Harmood not to get the tea till her mistress came back. Harmood consented, provided that the obnoxious expression was withdrawn. Only she did not put it that way. What she said was, "To wait for Mrs. Challis, sir?" Had Challis answered, "Yes, your mistress!" she might have shown a proper spirit. But as he said, with discretion, "Exactly!" Miss Harmood consented to postpone tea. His phrase seemed to admit inexactness in the epithet "mistress."

But the young lady was going to make no suggestions. If Mr. Challis liked to go without his tea, let him! *She* was not going to attempt to influence anybody. The hours passed, and ink that might have perished on a penwiper became a permanent record of thoughts which their writer always doubted the value of the moment after writing them. But perhaps they were immortal? No one would ever know till the very end of Eternity.

Was that actually six o'clock? Well—she wouldn't come now till dinner! He considered a short walk before she turned up; but the drizzle was one of those all-pervading drizzles that despise umbrellas, and do the garden a world of good. One never goes out for a walk in those drizzles. He would have another pipe, and think it over—perhaps write a little more presently.

He would have done more wisely to write the little more at once—to remain hard and fast at his writing-table. For he had not been long over the second pipe when the summer sun, now on its way to roost, got a chance to peep through a cloud-rift, and straightway Wimbledon was aware it was the heart of a rainbow it could not see, however palpable it might be at Esher. Now, it

chanced that just at the moment when the sudden prismatic glow flooded that vulgar, incorrigible drizzle, and clothed it in an undeserved radiance, Challis was watching the crystal beads that chased each other in a line along the under-edge of a sloping gutter above his window. He was wondering why they held on so tight—it was so seldom one dropped—when on a sudden they all became jewels, each with a little complete image of the sun in it, if they would only have stood still while one looked! And these jewels brought back a something to his mind. He felt it coming before he could define it: what was it going to be? Why, of course!—the gleaming beads or scales or spangles on Judith's dress, last night in the little garden with the funny name—what was it?——Tophet.

And then it all came back with a rush. He had contrived, in his home-surrounding, to dodge and evade, as it were, his memory of his folly of last night for a moment. He had now slipped unawares into his past; and malicious recollection had brought back this-and-that that was pleasant in it, but had closed the door against reminders of all that had been tedious and distasteful in his later married life. With no Marianne there in the flesh, to call attention to that morose and jealous temper she had developed in these later years, he had indulged in the luxury of forgetting it; and had repeopled the empty house with a cheerful version of its mistress, one that was exactly what the Marianne of old ought to have grown up into—not very clever, certainly—not Madame de Staël, by any means—but always good-humoured and ready to laugh at her own blunders, and gradually outgrowing that terrible vice of blood, that dire form of Christianity that made it a wonder to him how his new friend, that good parson-chap at Royd, should be tarred with the same feather. He had got into a backwater of the stream of life, and found a happy anchorage for a moment; and here came the torrent he had escaped, and caught him up and whirled him away with it, Heaven knows where! Little things make the great things of life, and no sooner was that miserable gew-gaw that was not even an expensive article brought across his mind by those jewel-drops flashing in the sun than he became again the heart-distempered victim of the image it brought with it—Judith in all her beauty, at its best in the moonlight. His incipient fit of reconciliation to his home had only been momentary, and the paroxysm of his disorder that upset it—how rightly he had spoken of it as a fool's passion!—sent him pacing to-and-fro across the room, catching at the empty air with nervous fingers, pressing them mercilessly on his eyes, as though he would

crush out with them the beautiful image of the woman that bewitched him.

This sort of thing is not so uncommon as you, perhaps, think. You have read of it, of course—best told by Robert Browning, perhaps—how "the Devil spends a fire God gave for other ends." That was like to be Challis's case if this went on.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A BAD RAILWAY ACCIDENT. AND, AFTER ALL, MARIANNE WAS AT HOME. CHALLIS'S REPORT OF ROYD. BUT NO!—MARIANNE WOULDN'T HAVE JUDITH SLURRED OVER

JUST as the cloud-rift closed and spoiled the rainbow a sound came of a cab approaching. Challis stopped in his restless pacing to-and-fro, and listened. . . . Yes!—the cab was stopping. That might be Polly Anne? The fact that his mind said "Polly Anne," by preference, showed that his relief at her arrival—for he was one of those who always fidget when folk are overdue—outweighed for the moment a feeling that he would be glad when he had passed the Rubicon of looking her in the face. He was conscious, though, as he ran downstairs to meet her, of a trace of the alacrity one shows as one enters the dentist's sanctum, to convince oneself one is really ready to have one's molar out. But before he got to the swing-round of the banister curve he knew it wasn't Marianne after all, this time!

Then, on the lower flight, he became conscious that it was that booby John Eldridge; saying, as one in indecision: "No—stawp a bit! I'll tell you in a minute," and then somehow contriving—as it were to fill out a pause for thought—a certain bubbling or wobbling noise, made with the end of his tongue between his lips. It was brief, for he soon added: "Suppose you was to tell him I was here! *I* can't see that any harm 'll come o' that. What's your idea?"

But Harmood's idea, if she had one, remained concealed behind her professional manner; which was what the Sphinx's might have been, had the latter taken a house-and-parlourmaid's place. For, perceiving Challis on the stairs, she passed her visitor on to him without reply, merely saying: "Mr. Eldridge, if you was at home, sir." This formula left it open to her to cancel or ignore Mr. Eldridge if her employer thought fit to deny his own existence in the face of evidence.

"I *am* here," said Challis, descending. "Like the Duke's motto! Marianne isn't, but I'm expecting her every minute. Anything

up?" This query related to a certain rosy uneasiness that hung about Mr. Eldridge's hesitation of manner.

"Oh no! No—nothing! Only Lotty said you were coming back to-day. Suppose we was to come in here!" "Here" was the front sitting-room, looking to the road. Harmood closed the street-door, and died respectfully away.

"By all means," said Challis. "Out with it, John!"

Mr. Eldridge struggled with obstacles to speech, which he endeavoured, by ostentatious clearing of the throat, to refer to chronic bronchitis. At last he got to "Mind you, Master Titus, it's ten to one there's nothing in it! But I thought it just as well to look in and tell you." Challis waited, with an ugly misgiving growing on him, till two words with a shock in them came, blurted out by the speaker, whom they left perturbed, mopping his brow and polishing his nose with his handkerchief. "Railway Collision!" said Mr. Eldridge. "Bad job! But don't you run away with the idea that . . ."

"That—that she—Marianne. . . ."

"Ah! Well!—I tell you, Master Titus, I don't believe she was in the train."

"You know nothing about it! Why didn't you stay to find out?" Challis finds natural irritation with this booby's method an easement against the new strain on his powers of bearing anxieties. One good point about which is that Judith and Royd Hall vanish with a clean sweep. Face to face suddenly with a hideous possibility, that Marianne may be killed or maimed for life, he is completely back in his old life again, and knows nothing outside the tension of the moment. In a very few seconds he sees that his informant *does* know nothing; having evidently, when he witnessed or heard of this accident, become the slave of a singular and not uncommon idea that the sooner ill news is heard the better, and having rushed off with his without waiting for details or confirmation. Challis gives him up as quite useless as an informant. "Your cab's there?" he asks. And receiving an affirmative, says with decision: "Wait till I get my boots on!"

Mr. Eldridge throws a bit of good counsel after him as he runs upstairs three steps at a time. "Don't you get in a stoo, Master Titus! Easy does it." He then retires into the parlour, and fidgets, variously. He drums on surfaces that offer themselves, feels about on his razor-farm for interesting incidents, whistles truncated tunes that do not last to identification-point, and frequently repeats, "Nothing to go by—nothing to go by—nothing to go by!" shaking his head and looking profound, till Challis comes

quickly downstairs. He calls out to Harmood in some remote background that he is going out, and doesn't know when he'll be back.

The cabman is good for information, and coherent. A petroleum explosion on the train from Haydon's Road. Just coming into the Station, and hadn't slowed down enough. Guard injured —couldn't apply the brake. Train ran beyond platform, and collided with truck, shunting. What did they want to be shunting trucks for, with the train just due? Anyone might have known there might be a petroleum explosion, and the guard not be able to apply the brake. Or anything else, for that matter! Anyone hurt? Oh ah, yes!—people enough hurt, if you came to that. All right! You two gents, if you jumped in, should be at the Station in no time.

Did you ever have the ill-luck to be the seeker after a possible casualty in a railway accident? If you have you will be able to guess what Challis went through in the hour that followed. Fortunately for him, the crucial moment of inspection of the bodies of two women unknown, for identification, was soon over. To a certainty, neither was Marianne. So also the few cases too bad for immediate removal were soon decided about—some without visiting them; these having been able to give their names. And if Marianne had been among those who had started for home, whether injured or scot-free, she would have been met on the road. They would have been sure to see her, or she them.

Moreover, there were not many people in the train, and Mrs. Challis was well known at the Station. She was a constant passenger by this line, going to Tulse Hill via Streatham. The officials at the Station felt sure they would have seen her had she been in the train. No other train would follow for some time that Mrs. Challis could possibly come by. Probably she had missed her train at Tulse Hill. Good job too, for her, said public opinion.

So Mrs. Challis's husband, relieved, but with a swimming head, and very uncharitable feelings in his heart towards the originator of all this needless alarm, drove home beside that really very stupid person; and so far as his own condition of semi-collapse permitted it, gathered the story of his friend's share in the matter, and what he considered a justification of his action.

It appeared that Mr. Eldridge had accompanied his wife to Wimbledon Station, on her way to an evening appointment in London. As she was getting into the carriage, the train on the other line came in from Haydon's Lane. She said to her husband:

"That's Marianne's train; she was going to Tulse Hill. You can drive her back in your cab. You'll find Titus at home. He was to be back to-day." Then, as her train left the platform, he saw a sudden blaze of fire from the guard's van of the other one; and the collision, as already described, resulted. A cooler or stronger judgment than John Eldridge's would no doubt have exhausted every source of information rather than jump at the conclusion that his friend's wife was necessarily among the injured because he could not find her among the survivors. His reasoning powers were not strong enough to stand by him through the panic of the scene that ensued, and he could see nothing for it but to convey the news of the supposed disaster to her husband.

Challis was inhospitable enough not to press him to come in and dine, and was so annoyed with his folly that he might not have done so even if less desirous of a quiet evening with the subject of all this alarm, who would no doubt appear in due course, though the best part of an hour late. He felt secure that nobody could be connected hypothetically with one mishap, and actually with another, on the same evening! Impossible! Mr. Eldridge seemed not so confident; for he said at parting, "Good-bye, Master Titus! Glad Marianne wasn't killed by *this* train!" and drove off to his own domicile.

The garden-gate was not locked; this was owing to Challis's return. For he always insisted that the front-door should be approachable, boys or no, when he was in residence. He got in with his latch-key, and going straight to the top of the kitchen-stairs, called out to Harmood, whose response came duly.

"Tell Mrs. Steptoe she must keep dinner back. Your mistress will be late."

"I beg your pardon, sir!"

"Tell—Mrs.—Steptoe she must keep—dinner—back!" Challis endorsed his mandate with forcible word-isolations, and gave fuller particulars of his reasons why. Harmood responded rather tartly:

"I beg your pardon, sir! Did you say Mrs. Challis?"

"Yes!"

"Mrs. Challis is come in, sir. Been in half-an-hour!"

"God bless me!" exclaimed Challis; and nearly added, "Why didn't you tell me?"—which would have been absurd. But he was saved from this by a voice from the floor above; Marianne's, unmistakably.

"Oh dear!—What *are* you shouting down in the kitchen for? Why can't you come up?"

"I'm coming, dear! When on earth did you come in?" His salute was cordial. Hers was . . . well!—she might have done better. But then, you see, she knew nothing about all this excitement that was afoot. And never forget that Mrs. Steptoe's legend of Ramsgate always hung in her mind.

"I've been in this past half-hour. Why did you go out again? It makes things so late."

"I'll tell you directly. How on earth did you get here?"

"How on earth did I get here?" It is slowly dawning on her that something has happened. "I drove from the Station. Just as usual! . . . I suppose that's the children."

"But how came we not to meet you?"

"Who?"

"John Eldridge and I—driving down to Wimbledon."

"How can I tell? I've not been at Wimbledon. I came from East Putney, as I told you, in a cab. You'd better get ready for dinner."

"All right! But how came you to come by East Putney?"

Marianne always had an irritating way of treating her husband as though he were inaudible and invisible. No doubt she meant no harm by it. But husbands do feel secretly nettled sometimes if they are, as it were, held in abeyance by a waved hand, to await the end of a colloquy they are excluded from. Challis felt, at least, that he was very good-humoured not to be nettled.

"What has made the children so late? I said no later than six." So spoke the lady, eliciting revelations of delay caused by the children hiding themselves. Due public censure of the offence followed.

Challis had become himself again by soup-time. "Well, Polly Anne," said he, "you've never told me how you came to go by East Putney!" The trifling excitement over the child had such a thoroughly old-world flavour with it that he was very much at home again, and Royd Hall had slipped away to dreamland.

"Oh, I?" Marianne is not ill-humoured now. But she is, to a certain extent, enduring her lot. You know how that's done? "A little bit of stopping came out of my front tooth, and I had to go up to Kensington to get it seen to. Of course, I hadn't written, and Roots and Leaver kept me an hour and a half."

"What did he have to do? . . . painful? . . ."

"Oh no—nothing! He put some fresh stopping. Only a few minutes! What took you to Wimbledon?"

"Well—you see!—our excellent friend John Eldridge came and

told me you were killed in the accident at Wimbledon Station. . . ."

"Oh! Was there an accident?"

"Yes. Nobody we know in it. But two women killed and several injured. It was petroleum." He gave particulars of the accident, dwelling on the fact that the wrecked train was the one his wife would have been in if she had not been at the dentist's. "But I *was* at the dentist's," she said, with a certain implication in her voice of "So I don't see what you have to complain of."

However, it slowly dawned upon her that this was a case for recognition of the mercies of Providence. These were of two classes; one of which, known to her as Divine Forgiveness towards Sinners, on condition that they went to church, was an entirely different thing from certain good-natured impulses on the part of the Creator towards persons in difficulties, prompting special intervention on their behalf to save them from the blunders of Creation now that He had set it fairly going, and left it to shift for itself. He was, it appeared, very catholic in these impulses, as often as not giving non-churchgoers the benefit of His reserved rights of intervention in the caprices of the material universe. Challis believed that his wife used up all the theological liberality of which she was capable in ascribing let-offs of Jews, Turks, Heretics, and Infidels to special interventions which could only postpone for a very short time their Eternal Damnation at the hands of the intervening power.

However, he was in no mood just now for laughing at her; so he let it be supposed that he acquiesced in what amounted to a suggestion that Providence had knocked out that bit of stopping from her front tooth in order to prevent her coming by that train. He kept absolute silence through her acknowledgment of her indebtedness to her Maker, being very careful not to allow his features to assume any expression whatever. For he had found by experience that absolute glumness, total suspension of speech and facial movement, with great caution and reserve in the use of the pocket-handkerchief, if resorted to, was almost a religious force in itself.

When the good lady had sufficiently discharged all her obligations in the proper quarter, another aspect of the case seemed to present itself. "But, my dear Titus, what a terribly anxious time you must have had!"

He would sooner have had this earlier. Providence could have waited. But—sooner now than never! "Why, my dear old girl,"

said he, "I was simply terrified out of my wits!" A hearty laugh came with this all the easier that it was his order of release from the ten-minutes' penal servitude he had just undergone in the cause of his wife's religious sensibilities. "Come now, old woman," he went on, "say you're sorry for giving me such a fright."

"Why—of course I'm sorry! What makes you suppose I'm not? *I* don't want to give you frights, I'm sure!" She paused a moment over the subject. Though *she* was not killed, it might touch her home-circle at some other point. "I wonder who the women were. Our laundress brings the Wash from Streatham. It might have been her coming to-day." She went on with particulars of the Wash; how it itself was centred at Wimbledon, but there was a *succursale* at Streatham, whence fine linen, got up, might be brought by rail. Challis interrupted:

"These two women I saw were not washerwomen."

"Oh dear!—were they ladies?" A note of alarm. Marianne had assumed that they were people. Challis strove not to seem to broach derision on the well-worn subject. He said seriously, "Ye-es, I think so." But then his inherent vice of mind got the better of him, and he added: "Not Duchesses, certainly! But ladies, yes! Perhaps they were Baronets' wives."

Marianne flushed angrily. "Now, Titus, you know that's nonsense! How is it likely that both of them should be Baronets' wives, when there they were in the same train. And you know perfectly well no one ever said a word about Duchesses! So it's ridiculous!" But still a shot home seemed wanting, so after a pause Marianne ended up: "I suppose it was meant to be witty. Only if it's to be that, I shan't sit with you while you smoke."

"No, Polly Anne dear, it's not to be that. Never mind my chaff! I had the impression they were people in our own sort of position in life—might have been friends of ours, don't you know! But we shall hear fast enough."

This conversation had taken longer than appears by the story; because, at a repast, converse travels slowly. Steptoe, or her equivalent, has to be found fault with at intervals, deservedly. By this time the best end of the neck, and the difficulty of carving it, were things of the past. So also was a slight sub-ruction occasioned by Challis being disgusting about Anne Boleyn's neck, and the bungling executioner who wanted all his patients' necks to be jointed at the butcher's. It was an old joke of his that always enraged Marianne. But he had begged pardon, and the topic had vanished with its cause. This and some minor matters

had made it coffee-time, when Marianne threatened to retire and leave Challis to enjoy his pipe alone.

She did not do so, being assuaged by her husband's seeming acceptance of social distinctions. But it rankled, too, as will be seen by the first thing she says to him as he settles down to his pipe. "Duchesses, indeed!"

If it were fine they would be out in the garden at the back. Only the drizzle is there still. But it keeps very close, too, and we must have the window wide open. The lamp won't blow out if we stand it away on the sideboard. This sideboard is the one that was bought—such a bargain!—for Great Coram Street. Those rings on the drawers that swing—handles to pull them open and find the corkscrew—are the rings that Bob in his infancy was permitted to use as knockers in a drama he was the hero of—a postman who delivered letters at very short intervals indeed. Oh, how his surroundings of this evening stung Challis with memories of his past! How they drove home to him the need to keep at bay those outlying fires—or wild beasts, were they?—that had made an inroad on his present.

If he could only have been a Roman Emperor now! Had he not read lately somewhere how Hadrian had married two Persian Princesses—real ones!—two at once!—as cool as a cucumber? Oh dear! . . .

What is that Marianne is saying? "*You're* not the one to talk, Titus!"

"Talk about what, Polly Anne?" His first puff, with this, and he is in great comfort and good-humour! The wild beasts are standing over.

"About Duchesses and Baronets' wives! Just look at your Grosvenor Squares!" There is little or no ill-humour here. Rather it might be called concession to good-humour; an admission of her husband's friends to their talk as permanent objects—forgiven objects, certainly—of critical raillery. No harm meant!

And if there were, Challis would ignore it, rather than have his pipe spoilt. "Don't let's talk about them," he says. "Let's talk about our Grosvenor Squares."

"*Your* Grosvenor Squares!"

"*My* Grosvenor Squares, then! Polly Anne shall have her own way." And then he had to stifle at birth a most excruciating thought: "If I had only just succeeded in keeping my accursed folly under, I might now have continued, 'You know, Polly Anne dear, they might be *your* Grosvenor Squares, too, and nothing

would please me better. Why not be jolly?'" How could he make such a speech now? His only chance of a real tranquil life was to keep as far away from the source of his disturbance as possible. He succeeded in suffocating the thought, and repeated, "Let's talk about my Grosvenor Squares."

Marianne's reply was a grudging sound. "Well!—and how are they?" The unspoken addendum seemed to be: "I suppose I must say *something*. What do you make of this, my minimum? Take it!"

But Challis was in for pretending that all was well, and the world unsullied by what Mr. Riderhood called "offences giv' and took." Everybody was very well at Royd, he testified. Only this time the house-party was so over-powering that he had not seen nearly so much of the family as on the previous occasion. In fact, some of the members he had hardly spoken to—a statement so intensely true that it brought his veracity up to a reasonable average.

"Of course," he said, "I was obliged to talk a bit to the old boy. Just as he was obliged to compliment the celebrated author on his last book. But I never got on the subject on which he is really interesting, the inner life of the Feudal System. . . ."

"Which is . . .?" said Marianne. Who, on being offered "William the Conqueror" as a substitute for his System, added: "Oh, I know! We used to say him, 'William the Conqueror, one thousand and sixty-six." Challis continued:

"Last time we had quite a long talk over it, and I'm not at all sure that we don't agree in the long run. He contends that the ideal of Feudalism . . ."

"What's that?"

"Same as the Feudal System . . . that the ideal of Feudalism, properly understood, is quite the noblest . . ."

"I beg your pardon, dear! Just one moment! *Yes*—Harmood! . . . *what?* You *must* come near and speak louder. . . . Well!—I suppose he must have eightpence. But tell him another time I shall go to Cowdery's, because they did them for sixpence. You haven't twopence in coppers, have you, dear?" Challis had, and the incident, whatever it was, closed. Marianne's economical instincts, needed in old days, had survived their necessity overmuch.

But the ideal of Feudalism didn't get properly understood that time. Challis left it, and began somewhere else: "Her ladyship I scarcely talked to at all, which I was sorry for, as I don't dislike her, and I fancy she knew some people named Nettlefold when I was a boy." He was quite aware of careless construction, fraught

with suspicion of imbecility; it really didn't matter. "As for Sibyl . . ."

"Do you mean Judith?"

"I mean Sibyl. I fancy she'll end by marrying that Lord Felixthorpe. They are always about in his motor together. By-the-bye, I hardly know how to thank that chap. He lent me his motor to the station this morning. I like him. He's too good for Sibyl."

But Marianne's attention has been caught by the honey in a flower on the way. "I don't understand these people and their ways," she says. "But I suppose it's all right if it's a motor. Charlotte says because of the chauffeur."

Challis's sense of the ludicrous gets the upper hand. "I should have thought the chauffeur would be too much preoccupied," says he. "Anyhow, I shouldn't be at all surprised to hear they were engaged, any day. As for the party itself, there were some very interesting people this time, and some most interesting talk on abstruse subjects after dinner."

But the lady felt she would rather hear Mrs. Eldridge on the meaning of the word "abstruse" before she ventured out of her depth about it. A queer word, that! Also, she does not mean to have Judith elided in this way. "What about the other one?" she says bluntly.

There it was!—the gist of the whole situation in a nutshell. *What* about the other one? As Challis laid down his pipe, half-smoked—a strange thing for him—he was aware that, without being absolutely tremulous, it would not do for him to bring his teeth very near together without touching, or they would chatter. They must be either clutched or parted. It is just possible that people exist who have never had this experience.

CHAPTER XXXV

OF MUTUAL MISTRUST. HANDSOME JUDITH! BUT MARIANNE HAD NO WISH TO PRY INTO HER AFFAIRS. HOW MATTERS WERE COMFORTABLER. PLEASE BURN THAT POSTSCRIPT! CHALLIS'S EXPLANATION. HOW IT FAILED, AND HE WENT FOR A WALK

PEOPLE go on making believe a thing is true which each knows to be false, or *vice versa,* a very long time. But when each believes the other thinks he knows nothing about the matter—or everything about it, as may suit his case best—reciprocal deception will have a still longer life. And longer still when each believes the other thinks that he believes . . . and so on across and across *ad infinitum,* in shuttlecock flights! Our own belief is that if this topic were discussed by Senior Wranglers, one or more of them would say something intelligible, which we can't, about the term of mutual deception increasing as the square of the distance of the shuttlecock flights, or their number. The first sounds best.

At what stage of the labyrinth of reciprocities were Mr. and Mrs. Challis left when the gentleman laid down his pipe? Perhaps, considering that one has other uses for one's brain, it is safest to leave that question unanswered. But there was this difference between them—that Mrs. Steptoe's Ramsgate tale had made of Marianne's mind a fruitful soil for suspicion; while Titus's, apart from a tendency to detect the influence now and again of Charlotte Eldridge, was disposed to acquit his wife of any ingenuity in cultivating crops of the weed—indeed, of very few mental subtleties of any sort whatever. She was to him the incarnation of stupidity and abstract goodness, a solid substratum of which was an article of faith with him, reconcilable with any amount of little tempers, or big ones. And this faith went the length of supposing that Polly Anne credited him with it, and knew it would prevent him imagining that she could think him capable of believing that she could foster suspicions against him. Simple and intelligible!

But the nervous tremor that seized on Challis when he laid his pipe down just now was too palpable to leave reciprocal deceptions intact, unless accounted for as foreign to the subject. Therefore, when Marianne recognized the abnormal nature of the pipe-movement by saying, with the mien of an answer-seeker, "Are not you

going to finish your pipe?" he felt that some intrepidity was called for, for both their sakes.

"Fancy I got a little chill in the damp . . . oh no!—I changed everything. Besides . . ."

"Besides what?"

"Well—it was such an awful business, you know! Why, when we were driving down to the station, how was I to know I shouldn't find you burned to a cinder? Just fancy!—Polly Anne!"

"*You* wouldn't have cared," says Marianne, softening. This was an improvement, and none the worse for the serious note in Challis's voice as he referred again to his relief when he knew the alarm had been for nothing. Nevertheless, in a sense, he was glad it was true that he had gone through strain enough to account for fifty nervous ague-fits. But he felt a dreadful hyprocite for all that! Just fancy!—availing himself of the incident to cover his embarrassment in answering a plain question about his young lady friend. But his duplicity *was* really for Marianne's sake as well as his own. Come now!

"I tell you what, Tito: you must have a regular good strong hot toddy to-night, with plenty of lemon. I'll make it for you." This was good—almost Coram Street again! Why spoil it? "I can't think what could possess you to go catching cold at the station. It didn't do any good." But she improved it: "You must have it after you're in bed, and you must have my *duvet*." Challis made no immediate protest against this policy, but the prospect of a June night under a *duvet* can never be tempting, even when one anticipates the sleep of a clear conscience. He was, however, really grateful, kissing a rather improved countenance his wife advanced on application: this phrase is taken from his mind, which had taken it, *more suo*, from the moneylender's column in the *Times*.

"It isn't anything; I've no objection to the toddy, though. Now, tell me some more about your mother . . . about the dentist . . . anything . . . oh, by-the-bye! one of my letters was from Bob. It's upstairs . . . I'll go and fetch it."

"Never mind it now! Or I can send Harmood. You didn't answer my question."

"Let me see—what *was* the question? No, don't ring! Harmood won't know where to find it. Besides, I don't want her fishing about among my papers." And the obstinate man went, and came back with the letter. If he hoped that the previous question was going to lapse, he was mistaken.

"The question was about your friend Miss Arkroyd." She took Bob's letter, opened it, and made a pretence of looking at it. But she left her restatement, with all the force it had gathered by delay, for his consideration while she did so.

He stood behind her, looking over her shoulder at Bob's letter. The exact thing that crossed his mind as he did so was that he had now a new box of wax vestas in his pocket. But, then, he had had to quash the thought that suggested it. "That's a portrait of the new second master putting on his trousers," said he. "*What* about my friend Miss Arkroyd, Polly Anne dear? . . . No, that's not his real name. Pitt's his real name . . . Rev. Iairus Pitt . . . Oh, well!—boys will be boys, you know. . . ."

But Marianne was not to be turned from her purpose by the Rev. Iairus Pitt, whose parents had not baptized him considerately. "Is it all settled about her going on the stage? . . . handsome Judith?"

So strangely had last night's image of Judith—or, rather, her identity—cancelled her previous one of the stage aspirant, that Challis all but exclaimed, "Oh, of course!—she *was* going on the stage. Actually I had forgotten that!" For he *had* forgotten it—Estrild and all!—in the outbreak of fever in which he had so completely forgotten himself and his position and his duties. But he kept to himself what would have been unintelligible to Marianne; not without a feeling of relief that her question had reminded him of an aspect in which Judith could be easily discussed by both, without any *arrière pensée*.

"Handsome Judith," said he seriously and equably as he resumed his seat, "has given up all idea of going on the stage. That's at an end."

"Oh!" A short and thick exclamation, very conclusive.

"I shall have to find someone else to play Estrild if I finish the play. . . ."

Mrs. Challis was considering. "She's going to be married, of course," she said.

"H'm!—I've no reason to suppose she is."

"You said her sister was?"

"I said something about Sibyl and Lord F. Yes!—but they're not twins, you know, she and Judith!"

"I know that. Really, Tite, I'm not the goose you always try to make me out! Besides, twins *don't,* invariably: sometimes one dies of a broken heart."

"Judith won't die of a broken heart when her sister marries," says Challis dryly.

"I understand. But, Tite dear, do consider! A married sister younger than herself!"

"Miss Arkroyd isn't the sort of party to contract matrimony in order to walk in front of her sister at Court. Besides, there might not be another coronet handy, to walk in front with."

"What sort of party is she, then?" Challis thought to himself that a certain class of stupidity makes as formidable a cross-examiner, sometimes, as cleverness itself. Getting no immediate reply, his wife repeated, "Well!—what sort?"

"She's a problem; that's the expression nowadays. I'm not sure it isn't as good as another."

"Never mind the expression! You know you admire her very much."

"I do. But, you see, Polly Anne?—she won't act Estrild. So where are we?" What a boon Estrild, recollected just in time, had been in this conversation!

"What excuse does she give for backing out?" The speaker's grim attitude towards suggested breach of faith grated on her husband. But that was all in the day's work—the bad day's work!

"I think I'll have another pipe. . . . Oh yes!—I'm feeling all right again now; it was nervous, after that horrible affair at the station. . . . I'll fill it up new, and then I'll tell the whole story."

"I have no wish to pry into Miss Arkroyd's affairs. However, tell me if you like."

"Not if you don't like!" Challis is again puffing in comfort at this point, and, to our thinking, matters are going easier. No particular reply comes from Marianne, and he assumes a disclaimer, saying, "All right, Polly Anne! I'll go on. It seems that the Great Idea had something to do with it. . . ."

"Let's see!—that's the Fine Art turn-out. . . ."

"Yes; the new Art and Craft affair—Sibyl's. There was a family row when she proposed to put up her name, with 'Limited' after it, over a shop in Bond Street." He went on, and narrated briefly how Sibyl had met her parents' remonstrances by saying that if Judith went on the stage, she didn't see for her part why *she* shouldn't conduct a business. Especially as it was distinctly understood that mechanics would not be employed; only craftsmen. Also that the articles sold would not be things, but art-products. Also that they would be curiously wrought. How the Bart. had interrupted her, to ask what on earth she meant by Judith going on the stage! For the most palpable and visible things would go on in the family under the worthy gentleman's nose, and he be

never a penny the wiser. "Then," said the narrator, "Judith was summoned, and there was a scene. The upshot was that both the young ladies being of age, and having a right to go their own way, it seemed at first that each would certainly carry out her intention, in spite of their parents' remonstrances. But maturer reflection showed Sibyl, whose sisterly feelings run high. . . ."

"They don't hit it off?"

"Exactly! . . . showed Sibyl that if she made her own compliance with her parents' wishes contingent on Judith throwing up the play-acting . . ."

"I see," said Marianne very perceptively; adding, as an underword, "There was the lord, too."

"It was what John Eldridge would have called a *wipe* for Judith. And, as you say, Lord Felixthorpe might have flinched at a stage sister-in-law."

"I didn't say so, but it was what I meant." An uncomfortable look comes on Marianne's face, as though something had crossed her mind. She says disconnectedly, "Tite dear!"—with a new intonation out of place at this juncture, but immediately after cancels it. "Never mind!—at least, never mind now! Go on about Judith."

Challis glanced sharply at her, puzzled by her words and their manner. But he let them pass, and continued: "Anyhow, Judith has given up the stage, and there is to be no shop with 'Sibyl Limited' over it."

"What do you suppose you will do about the play?"

"I must leave it alone for a little, and see how matters shape themselves. You see, the play was written for Judith Arkroyd, and you can't think what a job it will be to think another identity —Silvia Berens, for instance—into the part. Or Thyrza Shreckenbaum."

"I really *am* sorry for you, Titus. After writing things all over again and making alterations! Oh dear!" Marianne thought to herself, should she get up and go across the rug to her husband and kiss him? But then a memory must needs cross her mind—that story of the Ramsgate wedding—never cleared up! Till that was done, her *rôle* of domestic affection stopped short of gratuitous kissing. Some day she would get at that story, and know all about it.

Meanwhile matters were comfortabler; no doubt of it! That odious play-acting business was at an end—at least, so far as Judith, who was the vicious quitch in it, was concerned. Titus might have as much Silvia Berens as he liked; she knew *that*

would be all safe. Also, Marianne misinterpreted her husband's visible reluctance to talk of Judith, at first, as an excusable disgust with the young lady herself for the trick she had played him. He had got to speak of her freely enough at last. This was because, as a matter of fact, his sense of his surrounding relations was growing on him, and each moment was feeling comfortabler than its predecessor.

Challis finished his pipe, and they chatted of other matters. Then followed a good deal about the railway accident, and Challis talked learnedly about the flashpoints of petroleums. They seemed quite agreed that if it could only be established beyond a doubt that neither of them had ever seen or spoken to any one of the sufferers, or their relations or belongings, the calamity would come within the category of common accidents in newspapers, that happen every day somewhere, and can't be helped. But Marianne was terribly afraid that the guard, who was burned nearly to a cinder, must be the red-nosed guard who looked in at her carriage in the morning and asked if she had dropped a pair of double eyeglasses. That would bring it painfully near home.

Mr. Eldridge's impulsiveness and some of his individualities were reviewed. It was impossible to acquit him of having given his friend a perfectly unnecessary fright; but we would not dwell on it, for look at the excellence of his heart! This quality was always saving John from censure, which would have been dealt out unsparingly to the possessor of a bad one. It is extraordinary what an affliction you can be to your friends, with impunity, when once your intrinsic goodness is an established fact.

Even grandmamma was pacifically talked over—a thing that happened rarely enough. Marianne had not been very long with her, as, while they were at lunch, the tooth-stopping came out, and she knew that if it was not replaced the tooth would come on aching. These interesting particulars came gradually, as Marianne brewed the promised toddy. Challis had declined to have it in bed, as quite uncalled for by his malady, which he maintained, truly enough, no doubt, was purely a nervous affection.

But he never drank that toddy!

For when it was ready, Marianne said: "It's so hot I can't touch it. You'll have to wait."

"All right," he said. "I shall be a few minutes yet. I dare say I'll have another half-pipe to make up three. Don't you stop, old girl!"

Marianne yawned. "Well, perhaps I may as well go. I've had a good deal of running about, and I'm sleepy. Good-night, dear;

don't burn your mouth!" She was more her old self than she had been for a long time. For, you see, she had seen—but slowly—that her cloud had cleared away. Challis's own feeling that—for him—Judith must cease, had worked itself into speech that his wife had merely supposed to relate to the *chute* of the projected drama. It was a good wind that blew Judith away, whatever quarter it blew from.

She went close to her husband, giving him the right piece of her face to kiss. "Which tooth was it?" said he. She showed him, tapping it. "It's a very little hole," he said, "and a good tooth!" She replied: "That's why Mr. Leaver says it should be stopped with gold. Now, good-night, dear! Drink the toddy, and don't be very late!"

Now, if only this woman had just gone straight away to bed and slept! And if that man, who had fully sworn to himself—mind you!—that the thing he had to do was to thrust his past delirium behind him, had but smoked his pipe, drunk his toddy, slept and waked next day a wiser man, might not the whole of the silly story have passed into oblivion, and left this prosy tale of ours without a *raison-d'être*? Quite possible! But, then, no such thing happened.

For Marianne seemed to hang fire and hesitate over her departure. She paused as she passed the open window; the sweet air, now that the rain had stopped, was pleasant after so much smoke. "What a beautiful moonlight night it's come out!" she said. But the moonlight grated on her husband. That moon was only a day older and a shade smaller than the full orb shining on the little Tophet garden and that Calypso of last night, robed in a stellar universe of moonsparks. Why need the rain-rack, flying northward after doing the garden so much good, leave conscious guilt exposed to the sight of Artemis—or Hecate—who knew all about it yesterday? Why not have gone on raining a little longer?

Marianne took another view. She said again, "How lovely the moon is, Tite!" in an unusual way for her. For she was not given to romantic sentiments. Her husband read in her manner a recognition of their *rapprochement*; for such it was, though no official recognition had been bestowed on distance, its condition precedent. He went and stood beside her; and, for her sake as well as his own—so he thought—gazed on the moon with all the effrontery of those experienced reprobates, Mr. Brown and Lord Smith. He forsook the toddy to do so, having just tried it with his fingers, and decided it could be touched with safety.

They stood side by side at the window; a minute or more, maybe.

Then she said, almost as though conscious of some unscheduled ratification: "That'll do, dear! Now suppose I go to bed. The toddy will be cold." He followed her to the foot of the stairs, to endorse the cordiality of his send-off. There she kissed him again, but said, rather puzzling him: "I know you've forgiven me, Tite dear!"

He was moved as well as puzzled. "But, my dearest girl," said he, "what have I to forgive?"

"What I said in my letter." Whatever this woman's faults were, she was always downright.

"But, dear old goose, what did it all come to? You couldn't get away from home just now, or something. What did it matter? *That* was all right!" Oh, how he wished he could have added, "Come next time"! But, alas!—that was all over now; reasons why jostled each other in his brain. No more Royd!

"I didn't mean that," says the downright one, pushing facts home. "I meant what I wrote at the end, on the back of the last sheet. It was all nonsense, you know; I never meant it."

"I didn't see the back of the last sheet. I read it in a great hurry just going in to dinner last night."

"Well!—it was there. Don't read it; burn it! Can't you get it now, and burn it for me to see? I would so much rather."

Challis should have replied that he had got the letter safe somewhere, he knew, and he would look it up after he had finished his half-pipe. The reprobates the story has referred to would have done so; would probably have gone the length of turning out their pockets, slapping themselves on those outworks; would even have said, being men of spirit, Dammy, madam, the Devil was in it if they could tell what had become of the letter! Come what might, they would have cut a figure! Challis cut none, or if he did it was a poor one. The fact is that, considered as a liar, he was good for nothing—had a very low standard of mendacity; and, indeed, had suffered so much over this affair of Judith that it was a luxury to him to say something, at last, without any reserves.

"It's burned already, Polly Anne. So you may be easy. Ta-ta!" He had said it before he remembered how unready he must perforce be with details.

"Oh!" rather curtly. "I suppose you lit your pipe with it? Very well!"

He had better have let misapprehension stand. Better that amount of false construction than the actual facts. But he must needs clear his character. "No, Polly Anne; it was really no fault of mine. It was the merest accident. . . ." He stuttered

over it; and she, seeing he had some tale to tell or reserve about it —but, to do her justice, without any idea of a lion in ambush— waited with patience. This, as you know, is the deadliest way in which stammered information can be received.

"It really was—you know how imp . . . difficult it is to read by moonlight—and my wax vesta I lit to read it with was the last I had. It was when I threw it away—yes, when I threw it away it set fire to the letter. It burned my fingers, and I threw it on the ground." What a lame business! And he dared not mention Judith, and knew it.

Marianne's voice is changing a little as she repeats: "It burned your fingers, and you threw it on the ground?" She does not use the words "Please explain!" aloud. She merely leaves them unspoken.

But her husband has only begun saying "Yes . . ." uneasily, when she cuts him short. "Were they dining by moonlight at Royd last night?"

"No—no—of course not! You don't understand. . . ."

"I don't."

"I had read the letter myself just before dinner, and I missed reading the postscript, because it was late, and the dinner-gong sounded. This of the wax match was in the garden, after." It is coming slowly—the inevitable—and he is beginning to know it. Maybe Marianne sees the flush mounting on his face.

"I thought you never saw the back of the last sheet? Why did you want to read the rest again? Had I said anything wrong?"

"No, dear!—you don't understand. Listen. . . ."

"Yes—go on!" Because what has to be listened to seems to hang fire. However, it comes in the end.

"It was not I myself that wanted to read the letter again just then. . . ."

"Who had read it before?"

"I didn't mean that, either, dear—do wait!"

"I am waiting . . . tell me . . . tell me at once!" Surely Marianne's breath came a little short on the last words, and she is leaning on the banister-rail perceptibly. His answer comes in the quick undertone of one who wishes to get something said that he would have been glad to leave unuttered.

"I was asked if I thought you would mind your answer to their invitation being shown, and I could not remember a word in the letter that I thought you could possibly object to my showing . . ."

"Who do you mean by 'they'?"

"The—the family. Lady Arkroyd. . . ."

"My message was to Judith Arkroyd, who wrote to me. Do you mean *her* when you say *they*? Who else was there when she saw the letter?"

"No one."

"You had better tell me exactly what happened."

"I had. They had a party, and dancing going on. I went away to a quiet garden there is, to be out of the noise, and Miss Arkroyd was there. She had seen your letter arrive for me when the post came, and had seen me after reading it just before dinner, and seen me slip it in my pocket. She asked to be allowed to see it—I know with some idea of inducing you to change your mind and come, and I . . . I may have been wrong, you know . . . only remember I had not read the postscript you speak of . . . well! I let her look at it."

"Then about the matches and the fire?"

"Just an accident. I held a match for her to read by, and it caught a gauze veil she had. It was just got clear in time to save her a bad burning. But the letter caught in the blaze, and was burned before I could save it. That is all!"

"Is that quite all?"

"Quite all!"

"It is quite enough. Good-night!"

"Oh, Polly Anne, Polly Anne!—don't think—don't believe? . . ."

"Go on. What?"

". . . anything but what I've told you . . . Oh, my dear! . . ."

But Marianne has left him, and is on her way upstairs. She is quite changed from the Polly Anne who was standing by the window but now. She walks stonily, and looks white. But her fortitude only lasts as far as the return of the staircase. As she turns, and knows that he can see her face from below, lighted as it is by the gas on the landing above, she breaks down altogether, and reaches her bedroom-door in a passion of hysterical tears.

"No—no—no—no!" she cries. "Take away your hands. Go away and leave me." For her husband has followed her, three steps at a time. He knows, and the knowledge is a knife in his heart, how wrong he has been; not in falling in love out of bounds—a thing he had no control over—but in showing that letter, which he could easily have refused to do. Passion and action live on opposite sides of the river. Now, what worlds would he give to find palliation for himself in his inner conscience!—it is the

want of that that ties the tongue of his explanation to her. Yet he must qualify his contrition, if only that plenary admission of guilt would be taken to imply still more, and worse, to come.

"Polly Anne dearest, for God's sake don't run away with a false idea! A great deal too much is being made of a trifle. If you would only be patient with me! . . ."

"I am patient. Now tell—what is the false idea? Why is it too much? Why is it a trifle?—showing my letter to—to that woman before you had read it yourself!" She is killing her sobs as she speaks, and has a hard struggle. They are heads of a Lernæan Hydra.

"Don't be unfair to me, dear! I *had* read it, all except that one bit on the back. It was so easy to miss it!"

"*I* never do—things on the back of letters."

"It was stupid of me. But what you don't understand, dear, is that I wanted Miss Arkroyd to read your message herself. There was certainly nothing you could have minded her seeing in the letter itself."

"Indeed! How do you know?"

"Well!—I don't know; I think."

"And when you had put Miss Arkroyd out, what happened?"

"How do you mean 'what happened'?"

"Oh, don't tell me if you don't like! I am out of it!"

Now, Challis would have liked to be able to say, "It is by your own choice that you are out of it; and the whole of this misunderstanding has grown, through a good intention of this lady you hate, to bring you into it." But he had tied his own tongue. "It"—whatever it was—had ceased to exist for him now at Royd. And probably his future intercourse with Grosvenor Square would be limited to just such an allowance of formal calls as would draw a veil over strained relations, and silence suggestion of ostracism. His behaviour of the previous evening had created a no-thoroughfare; but the conversation had hardly arrived at the notice-board.

"Nothing happened; the burns were not bad." His words were almost true—the prevarication, in this form, of the slightest, but the notice-board was clearly legible by now. "We left the garden, and no more was said about the letter, because some men from the house joined us, talking politics."

But Marianne has gone stony. Her manner rejects the men from the house, who talked politics. "I s-see," she says, fully expressing the closure of her mind against all extenuations, palliations, evasions, or excuses. "The letter was burned, and there was an end of it."

"Exactly! An end of it!" He extended the phrase in his mind to his relations with Royd, and all belonging to them.

Marianne waited so incisively for anything further to be said by her husband, and he felt so certain that if the no-thoroughfare notice were disregarded, the trespassers would suffer penalties—his own being enforced disclosure of what would be injurious to both, and quite useless—that he was almost glad when his wife said stonily: "Your whisky is getting cold. Perhaps you had better take it." He answered drearily, "Perhaps I had," and went away, but not to the dining-room. He went to his own study, and sat there aimlessly, thinking, in the half-dark. Presently, making as little noise as possible, he went downstairs, put out the lights that had been left burning, and, going stealthily out at the front-door, went for a walk in the moonlight.

But that carefully mixed nightcap remained untouched, and was placed by Harmood on the sideboard, as an embarrassment difficult to dispose of where no man-servant was kept. And there it reproached its maker and its non-consumer in the morning.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOW CHALLIS AND HIS WIFE PARTED. A DINNER AT THE CLUB, AND HIS RETURN FROM IT. WHAT HAS BECOME OF YOUR MISTRESS? A LETTER FROM MARIANNE CRAIK. DAMN CHARLOTTE ELDRIDGE!

THERE are no hours more miserable than the first ones of a day after a quarrel, or high tension akin to a quarrel. Next morning at the Hermitage found it full of silences and reserves. Mr. and Mrs. Challis were speaking with studied forbearance—even civility—towards one another. The children had been told to make less noise, and had made it, but had then been told to make still less, and so on, to the point of virtual extinction. Their mother had risen at her usual time, but looking ill, and had scarcely found fault with her usual spirit. And yet Harmood, whose intuitions the story is now following, observed that the butter had a flavour—namely, the one it so often has; and the eggs were the sort that won't boil. There is another sort, which has a passion for disintegration; but this time it was the former, which is worse; and yet they were accepted in silence. Harmood saw clearly that there had been words, and forthwith resolved to select this moment to give warning suddenly—a step she had been contemplating for some weeks. An up-to-date English servant respects herself more, or less, in proportion to the degree of confusion into which she can plunge her employers when she throws up her situation.

Mr. Challis had only waited—Harmood noticed—to see the children as they went out for an early walk, not to be in the hot sun too much. He kissed both affectionately, but his customary jokes with them were rather under his breath. He then went to his room, and presumably wrote something Harmood's inner consciousness was able to form a low opinion of, without perusal; for whenever she did out the study she mentally classed MS. literature as a lot of stuff.

Mrs. Challis transacted necessary household business, and went straight to her room, saying she was going out, and was not sure when she should be back. At the street-door she was stopped by Harmood, respectfully but firmly. Was she likely to be back before twelve? She couldn't say; why? Of course, because Miss

Harmood wished to give warning, and if she did not do so before midday, she would have to pass twenty-four hours more under the roof that had sheltered her for three years at least. As Mrs. Challis might be out, she would prefer to give a month's warning forthwith.

Mrs. Challis did not show the panic Harmood had promised herself the sight of. On the contrary, she barely raised her eyebrows as she answered: "Certainly, Harmood! To-day is the twentieth," and was actually going out. But she paused an instant at a prefatory cough from the handmaiden. Had the latter any complaint to make? The answer renounced complaint, but with implication of generosity. "Very well!" said Mrs. Challis thereon. "I can't wait. The twentieth." And went away, leaving Harmood mortified.

She came back between twelve and one. She was heated with walking, but might have been crying, too. So Harmood thought when she let her in. She went upstairs, speaking to her husband outside his door. She had just come back from Charlotte's, she said. Was he there? Yes—he was, and came out at once to speak with her. He was amiable, but subdued. Had waited for her, in case there was anything—a vague expression, but conciliatory under the circumstances. There was certainly nothing—no doubt about it. Was he going out?—his coat suggested it. Yes; he would not be in to lunch. A letter had come by the second post, asking him to meet a man on business in the City at two. He would lunch at Scallopini's, and stay at his club, where he had promised to dine with his publisher and some authors at 7.30. But he would not come in late.

Then Marianne said coldly: "Don't hurry on my account."

He answered, as cheerfully as he dared—that is, not to seem to ignore the conditions: "You'll go to bed just the same, of course?"

Her reply was: "I shall go to bed." Nothing more. She went on to her own bedroom.

Challis could almost have sworn he heard a sob as the door closed. Was it so or not? He could not bear the doubt. He would risk it—go to her, throw himself at her feet, cry out in his misery for pardon for the past, and oblivion; for a pact of hope for the days and hours to come. If he could only have made his decision a few seconds sooner! But he just missed the chance, as Marianne opened her door and came back, stony.

"I forgot to tell you. Harmood has given warning."

"Harmood! Why—what on earth has the woman to complain of?"

"I can't say. *I* have given her no cause of complaint. She makes no complaint, as I understand."

"Well!—that *is* extraordinary! However, she's not indispensable. We can do without her. Only you'll have such a bother to find someone else."

Marianne said: "I don't think I shall." And Challis imagined that she referred to some possible servant or useful agency that she knew of. But the thought in her mind was different, as we shall see. Challis recalled her words afterwards. All that this talk of Harmood meant for him then was that a good impulse had been spoiled by it.

He looked at his watch, and found he would only just have time to get to town, get some lunch, and be ready for his appointment, which was an imperative one. He changed slippers for boots, and was ready. With his hand on the open street-door, he called out to his wife: "Good-bye, then! I'm off." Contrary to his expectation, she came downstairs.

"You are off," she said, repeating his words. "Good-bye, then!" And rather to his surprise she kissed him, saying: "Yes—then, good-bye!" All the manner of it was a little odd. But his instincts—may be mistaken ones—told him to let well alone. He replied with a warmer kiss than hers had been, and a moment after was on his way to East Putney Station. He was very uncomfortable about losing sight of her for so long. But, after all, it might give their relations a better chance of readjustment. Nothing like a pause!

A business colloquy of some warmth, with a reference to possible legal proceedings, was followed first by a pleasant afternoon at the Club, and next by a very informal dinner of six—of whom at least three were amusing dogs—and lastly by a saunter homewards with one of the amusing dogs, who wished him good-night at Gloucester Road Station. All these experiences were of the sort that brushes cobwebs from the mind, and Challis was feeling much freer at heart when, after midnight, his latchkey clicked in the front-door at the Hermitage, and admitted him to a silent house.

Well!—of course, a house is silent when everyone has gone to bed. What would you have?

Challis lighted his candle and gathered up his letters to read in his study. He went furtively up the two short stairflights, secretly hoping that Marianne would speak from her room to him; for, however quiet he was, she almost always heard him, the exceptions being when he was unusually late, and she very sound asleep. He paused a moment to favour the chance. Not a sound!

He glanced at her door with an uncomfortable feeling he could not at first account for, a sense that it disclaimed an inmate. In a moment, however, he mastered the reason of that. Nothing so very unusual! Only that she had forgotten to put her boots out. Well!—this wasn't a hotel. How absurdly nervous he was, and fanciful!

He turned into his study and lighted his reading-candle, with the reflector. He would be there some time; there were so many letters. First he would open the window, though, to let the sweet night-air in. It was so overpoweringly hot.

Then he sat down to his desk and began upon his letters. One advertisement of no value. Two advertisements of no value. A thick letter from Nebraska to the author of his own first work, etc., etc., care of his publisher; that might be amusing. An enclosure of slip-cuttings; so might that. . . . Hullo!—what was the meaning of this? One to Mrs. Alfred Challis among his letters! Marianne had overlooked it. Odd, that!

But—but—but, that was not all! Another, and another to Mrs. Alfred Challis. Overlooked?—*impossible!* Utterly impossible! She must be still out. Where could she have gone? Did not she say she had been at Charlotte's in the morning? Where else could she go? Where else was there to go? Tulse Hill? Why—she was there yesterday!

He sat there a full two minutes, without dropping the letter he held when the thing amiss first caught him, or changing his posture of face or hand. He sat pursuing possibilities in thought, and overtaking none. Then, with sudden resolution in a face white as the envelope he dropped, he rose and went straight to his wife's room, lamp in hand. On the way a thought came—it was just a bare chance!—had she gone to bed early with a headache, saying she was not to be disturbed?—and had all these letters come by the last post? Not probable, certainly, but not impossible! At least, he would knock at her door before going in and waking her suddenly. She would be less surprised.

He tapped and heard nothing. He listened longer than need was, clinging artificially to hope. Then he opened the door and went in. There was no one in the room.

Was there nothing that would give him a clue at once? He could not think coolly yet; utterly useless with this nervous ague-fit on him! He knew it would subside in time, and he would be able to think. But for now, was there nothing?

For instance, in the appearance of the bed? Yes—something! Surely his recollection did not deceive him. Should not the bed,

by rights, be "turned down," and be yawning, as it were, for its occupant? Would there not be, normally, some appearance of night-clothes; if not laid out on the coverlid as though courting their contents, at least beneath the pillow? He threw it aside; there was nothing.

On the dressing-table, then? Yes!—the brushes and combs were not there. They might be in the drawer, though. But how about those stoppered bottles? One was clear in his memory—square, with horizontal corrugations and a flat disc with a statement, hazarded by a writer in gold, that it contained eau-de-Cologne. Where was it? Not on that table, nor the chimney-piece. A great fear was on him that she had *gone!* Then it flashed upon him that if she had, she would have taken her jewels with her. Where did she keep them? In the top wardrobe-drawer. It would be locked, but he and she had a secret knowledge that one key opened all the drawers alike. He felt like an over-sensitive detective; but he got the key and opened it. The jewel-case was there, sure enough, but—not locked! He opened it, and saw at a glance that none of her favourites were there. Oh yes—she had gone! Marianne was gone—there was no doubt of it now!

He dropped back, feeling sick, on a chair, face to face with reality. Event agrees ill with men of Challis's temperament, the sort that can become unhealthily excited by the puppets of their own imagination. That railway accident yesterday was bad enough! But this—think of it!—at home, with the children to tell in the morning!

He tried to think—what next? Rouse the servants? Of course; but which servant? Nurse by preference, certainly. *Procul absit* Steptoe, and even Miss Harmood! He rose, feeling weak; and without his lamp, for all the house was navigable in the glorious moonlight, found his way to the nursery. Nurse slept in the little room just off it on the landing. But the rooms had a door between, in case of anything in the night. That is nurse's phrase, not ours.

Just as Challis was framing in his mind the question he should ask—and all forms that suggested themselves seemed to intensify the position—the thought crossed his mind that it would be a relief to see those youngsters asleep in the moonlight. Surely it would!—or, would it? He would risk it. He opened the nursery-door furtively, and stole in. But darkness reigned—curtain-darkness; shutter-darkness. Challis knew that little girls that sleep exposed to moonbeams suffer in some mysterious way—go blind, or go silly, or are witched away by bogles. He wasn't sure which.

He tiptoed to the window, and could let in the light without noise, for, as it turned out, there was no shutter. What of the bed? He knew how nice they were in bed. All children are.

But the bed was empty.

* * * * * * *

Mrs. Steptoe, roused from her first sleep, which was about two hours old, and a promising sample, thought at first that she was back in Tallack Street, and that the noise was her lamented husband, the worse for liquor. Further revived, her decision that it might be thieves, and that her choice of action would lie between affecting sleep and calling "Police!" from the window, was short-lived; and she followed it up by referring her master's cries to fire. Harmood's consciousness passed through analogous phases, but with this difference: that the second one did not suggest immediate action. A servant who had just given warning might surely go on pretending to be asleep, unblamed. Was she there at all, technically?

However, the thought of the great terror "Fire!" brings the laziest from his bed. Neither waited to be sure that she was being called by name, but ran out on the landing above, belonging to the attics, to be encountered by Challis's voice from below, shouting madly, "What has become of your mistress? Where are the children? Where on earth are you all? Come down at once!" and so on.

Mrs. Steptoe's tremulous accents stopped him, but he could not catch what she said. "Come down here at once," he cried again, "and speak up plain. Where is your mistress, and the children?" He just got his voice under control for the question.

Mrs. Steptoe came down half-way. Her costume forbade a complete descent. "The mistress and the young ladies and nurse, sir?"

"Yes!—the mistress and the young ladies and nurse. Where are they? Speak quick!"

Mrs. Steptoe found voice enough to say: "Ain't they at Tulse Hill, sir?"

"That's what I want to know. Do *you* know?"

Mrs. Steptoe found some more voice. "Didn't the mistress say Tulse Hill, Harmood?" She asked the question of the unseen, above, not without recognition of her own necessity as a go-between. Direct communications from a house-and-parlour-maid, single, in a nightgown, could hardly be in order under the circumstances.

"Mrs. Challis said Tulse Hill, Mrs. Steptoe." The delicacy of the position is recognized, and the intercessor and mediator installed. Who repeats the words officially, and adds, as a mere human creature: "My word a mercy, what a turn it giv'!"

"What did your mistress say? When did she go? Did she leave no message?"

"Not with me, sir!" Then officially: "Did Mrs. Challis leave no message, Harmood?" Which, substituting as it does a name for an offensive designation, confirms and ratifies the claim to mediumship made by the speaker, who accordingly repeats the substance of Miss Harmood's communication from above, replacing the offensive designation in the text where it had been ignored in the original.

"The mistress didn't leave no message, sir, only a note. She was taking the young ladies to their grandmamma's, and we was not to expect her back."

"Where's the note? . . . Did she name any time?" To this Miss Harmood, overstepping delicacy, and speaking, as it were, with the direct voice, replies:

"Mrs. Challis said no time, sir, but you would know. She took her things to stay, and the young ladies, and went about three."

"About three." Mrs. Steptoe confirms, adding: "The note is left on the 'all-table." This anticipates the question on Challis's lips, and also reinstates delicacy, making further direct communication unnecessary.

Challis says abruptly, "You had better get back to bed, both of you!" and goes to bring the lamp from the bedroom. He sees at once that he had overlooked the letter, which must have been at the bottom of the handful he brought up. Of course, it would be, if it was written before three. All those later letters would have hidden it.

Yes—there it was, directed to "Mr. Challis" and nothing else. He brought to the surface a memory of having noticed it at first, and thought it a tradesman's account or a begging application. Now he could see the handwriting. He could not have said whether he was more anxious or afraid to open it. Perhaps the former, so great was his wish to know how it would begin. But it had no definite beginning, such as letters usually have.

"You do not really care for me, so I have made up my mind to leave you—it is all at an end between us, for *you do not really care for me*—now you can go away to Miss Arkroyd *if she will have you*—it will not be bigamy, and *you know why*—I am Kate's

sister, and we cannot be legally Man and Wife—mamma has said so all along.

"Oh, Titus, how could you show that letter—could I have acted by you like that?—to show it to that woman to read before you—think if it had been me—my letter showed to *some gentleman* you half knew, *and me not seen it first*—oh, Titus—but it is good-bye.

"Besides, I know, because of the garden all by yourselves—Charlotte says so."

Challis started to his feet as he read these words. "I knew it—I knew it!" he cried to the empty air. "Oh, damn that woman!—with all my heart and soul, damn that woman!" He added, without circumlocution, words to the effect that if ever a woman of infamous character existed, she was one. It seemed to soothe him; and after pacing the room once or twice with the letter in his hand, he came back to the lamp, and went on reading:

"Charlotte says so—only it is only the *sort of thing* I mean—I have *no accusation to make*—you must believe what I say—it is what *I know you feel* I go by—and I think *most women would, too*. If you had cared for me you COULD not have done it, but though you have behaved so to me I shall try to forgive you, though I have quite made up my mind that we must part.

"Dear Titus, I know I have often been short-tempered, but that is another thing—now good-bye.

"Affectly. yours,

"MARIANNE CRAIK."

The name was on the fourth line of the last page, though a postscript followed. Challis broke out impatiently into a sort of painful half-laugh, as his eye caught his wife's maiden name. "What folly!" cried he. "What sheer, unqualified folly! Polly Anne!—just fancy! Why—she *is* my wife: nothing can make her anything else." And then he went on to the postscript.

"POSTSCRIPT.—I have taken away the children, because they are my own. You can ask Mr. Tillingfleet—because he told me—I suppose a lawyer knows——" Here the writing turned sideways, running up the paper-edge: "It is no use your coming to see me—my mind is made up." Then a further continuation, rather illegible on the paper-edge, Challis made out to be: "I will not say, God forgive you, because you do not believe in God."

Challis sat still after reading this, becoming calmer, and thinking. At last he said: "It's all nonsense! Polly Anne will come back fast enough when I've got the kids back. She can't keep *them*." He seemed quite satisfied of it.

He thought he should not sleep if he went to bed. But he did both, and was a sad man in an empty house when he awoke late from a happy oblivion, and slow remembrance came.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HOW CHALLIS COULDN'T BELIEVE MARIANNE WAS IN EARNEST. HOW HE SOUGHT HER AND FAILED. THE EYES OF HOLY WRIT. THE DISGRACEFUL TRUTH. DEAR MISS ARKROYD! WHY FIGHT AGAINST INFLICTED LIBERTY? GLENVAIRLOCH TO LET

"WILL Mrs. Challis be back to lunch, sir?" Thus Harmood the respectful, after giving a certain amount of attention to a series of concessions, collectively called breakfast. Her mistress being absent, she was taking advantage of Challis's readiness to submit to anything rather than attend to the domesticities. Just like his fellow-males elsewhere! She was fortified in the adoption of this course by the reflection that she had given warning. And a servant who has given warning is a problem not to be solved under the most subtle definition of Existence yet formulated, even by Graubosch. She is not an Abstract Idea; would not the butcher's bill diminish in that case? On the other hand, could any concrete thing, worthy of the name, do so much in the way of leaving coal-scuttles at stair-feet, or its black-leadin' brush in the empty grate; or its dust-pan full of tea-leaves for when it should be ready to begin sweeping; or the windows flaring wide open, and the door, and all master's papers blowing about?

The story can't settle that point now, nor could Challis. It was metaphysics, and Mr. Brownrigg's business. All the victim of Harmood's qualified entity could distinguish was, for instance, that the table-cloth was grudgingly disposed so as to cover one-third of the table only. Being a tablecloth of huge bulk, with a court-train at each corner, it refused, when quadrupled, to have anything stood on without tumbling over; notably a needlessly small milk-jug, evolved from some obscure corner to stint master in milk with. It wouldn't stand only you held it; so, of course, it just slopped over. But, of course, there was plenty of milk in the house, and the incident closed with Harmood actually bringing The Milk itself, in the most matronly white jug that ever was seen, that seemed to have thrown its whole soul into stability, like Noah's wife in his Ark, who can be stood up on a rough carpet cattle fall sideways on, knocking down their neighbours.

Need it be said that Challis's observation is followed in all this?

It shows a state of mind not fully alive to the reality of his position. He was, in fact, pooh-poohing the idea that Marianne's action was more than an outburst of ill-temper, the result—he admitted this—of a perfectly natural resentment under the circumstances. Of an unjust one—yes! He said this to himself again and again, but never exactly located the injustice. He could perceive that this resentment was due to gross misapprehension of the facts of the case, but he cautiously avoided details of the misapprehension. He may have felt misgivings that Marianne was not so very wrong, after all. Women can decide this; no man's verdict has any weight in such a matter.

He attached a certain value to Harmood's concessions of warmed-up coffee, and eggs which were a caution to poachers. He took no advantage of them, or very little, as breakfast; but till they were finally left to perish of cold neglect, he could postpone his answer to the question, "What's to be done next?" However, it would have to be answered some time. A cigar in the garden would help. There is nothing like a cigar after breakfast to clear one's head. But first he must answer that question of Harmood's. *Would* Mrs. Challis and the young ladies be back to lunch?

"Just ask Mrs. Steptoe again *exactly* what your mistress said," Challis takes a pleasure in rubbing in the obnoxious expression. Harmood's conduct has been detestable. But she is conscious, from Mr. Challis's manner, of her success. From Mrs. Challis's she had been able to form no opinion.

Mrs. Steptoe testified from the basement, and Harmood returned. No—Mrs. Challis had said nothing but what had been reported last night. She was taking the young ladies to their grandma's, and we was not to expect her back.

"Back to lunch, or *what?*" Challis raises his voice over the question, and Harmood refers to her authority, with an air of indifference to trifles of this sort. Bald confirmation comes of the wording of the message; no interpretation.

"Very well, then! Your mistress didn't say she *wasn't* coming to lunch. Of course she *is* coming to lunch." Challis repulsed an attempt of Mrs. Steptoe to entangle him in the problem of how some abhorrent remainders from the larder—which she offered to show—might be best utilized, and got away to that cigar in the garden, to think. . . .

Damn interruptions!—no, he couldn't see anybody. . . . Stop! who was it? Miss Harmood, who had not been explicit enough, now testified to Mr. Eldridge; whereupon Challis asked

her why she couldn't say so at first? This was unjust and irrational; but Miss Harmood had given warning, and felt partly disembodied. What did it matter to her?

It was John Eldridge, not very intelligible, but in much perturbation at something. "Well—you see!—it was Lotty's idea he should come round. Never would have entered his head himself! No sayin', though!" This was a favourite expression of his, presenting him as a sage prone to suspension of opinion, and open-minded.

After using it once or twice, he used his pocket-handkerchief, causing Harmood to inquire whether Mr. Challis had called. He then stood over the object of his visit, whatever it was, to ask, as an entirely new idea, "How are you yourself, Master Titus?"

"*I'm* all right, John. Won't you smoke?—that one at the end's very mild." But Mr. Eldridge wouldn't smoke; it was too early in the morning. Besides, he was late at the office. Challis avoided analysis and comparison, and made essays towards explanation of the visit. "Any more railway accidents?" said he.

"Wasn't that the day before yesterday?" Mr. Eldridge stopped polishing his nose to ask this. Challis explained that it was quite recent enough—he was in no hurry for more. He chose to suggest that the question, which had absolutely no meaning whatever, was intended to impute to him an unnatural lust for railway accidents. Mr. Eldridge seemed at a loss, saying: "Now you're poking fun, Master Titus! None of your larks!" Then he muttered to himself. "Thought so—thought so—day before yesterday!"

It was evidently going to be a matter of patience. Challis knew why his visitor had come, of course, but he was not going to supply him with guidance. Perhaps it would be quickest and simplest to leave him entirely alone. Then he would have to burst, or go. He chose the former, after some vague soliloquy about not having inquests on Sundays.

"You don't object to my lookin' round to speak about it, Master Titus?"

"Not a bit, John! Please speak. What is it?"

A gentle reproachfulness was on Mr. Eldridge as he answered: "No—come, I say, now—no gammon, suppose!" And Challis really commiserated him. What a position to be in! To be sent round by your wife, in the legitimate exercise of her omnipotence, to lecture a neighbour believed to be involved in a quarrel with his! And that, too, when you happen to have, from no fault of your own, but from predestination, a short supply of words, and defective powers of construction. Challis appreciated

the position quite clearly, and decided to be good-natured. After all, it was that detestable meddlesome Charlotte, not her booby husband himself—most probably—that had organized this expedition into his territory.

"All right, John!" said he. "No gammon, suppose! *I* know what you want to speak about. Marianne."

"Well, you know!" says John ruefully, "my idear was Charlotte should come herself. Much better idear!"

"What for? Very happy to see her, of course!"

"Well, you know, Master Titus, that's just what I keep on sayin' to Charlotte, that it's no concern of either of ours."

"Sharp chap!" This is interjected privately. So far as it reaches the audience, it seems to be accepted as laurels. "Now, suppose you and Charlotte were to take a holiday, and just leave me and Marianne to fight it out our own way. *We* shan't quarrel."

Mr. Eldridge became snugly confidential. "There, now, Master Titus, isn't that exactly what I said to Lotty? The very words! 'You leave them to fry their own fish,' I said." Challis thought of his philosophical friends at Royd; here was a new definition of identity wanted! "'You leave them to fry their own fish.' It's what I've been sayin' all along. But when females get an idea, you may just talk to 'em. Nothin' comes of it. . . ."

"What was her idea?"

"Me to come and talk it over in a friendly sort of way. Try to pave the way to a good understanding. . . . Lots of expressions she used! . . ." He paused to recall some. ". . . Oh ah!—I remember . . . 'painful misunderstanding'—that was one. And 'tact and delicacy.' She's a clever woman, Lotty, that's a fact, Master Titus."

"Devilish clever, John! Everyone knows that. 'Tact and delicacy' is a capital expression. It reminds me of Mrs. Chapone, but I don't know why." John seemed flattered, and Challis continued, with some disposition to laugh outright: "Look here, old chap! You and that clever lady of yours may just as well be easy. You think Polly Anne and I have quarrelled. But we haven't. And we shan't. I tell you, the thing's out of the question. Sheer nonsense!"

Mr. Eldridge's idea of identity comes to the fore again. "Just what I said—'reg'lar tommy rot.' Mrs. J. E., she agreed with me, down to the ground. There was another expression she used, now! . . . what the dickens was it? . . . Oh, I know!—no, I don't. . . . Oh yes!—'parties God had joined together let no man put asunder.' Nice feelin' about that!"

"Well!—no man's going to put anyone asunder this time, whether God united them or the Devil. Don't you go and repeat that remark to Mrs. J. E., John."

"No—no, Master Titus! Never say anything—never say a word!—that's the rule. Never say the Devil—never say God; not before females. Keep 'em snug! Good behaviour's paramount—can't be too particular! Expression of my wife's. . . . I say, I must be runnin'."

"They'll be sending for you from the Office if you don't." Then, as his visitor was departing by the front gate, he called to him from the house-steps: "Sorry the missis and the kids aren't back. They went to Tulse Hill yesterday. I'm going down there presently, only I've some work to finish first." And Harmood overheard, and condemned her employer for his contradictory testimony. "'Ark at him lying!" was the candid form her censure took. Mrs. Steptoe, saying a word in arrest of judgment, for the pleasure of gainsaying Harmood, was met by "Now, didn't he say, only this minute, Mrs. Challis would be back to lunch?"

The question whether, when Mr. Challis remained to lunch at home, as though he expected his wife's return, and immediately after took his departure for Tulse Hill, he had not reconciled his apparently conflicting statements, formed the subject of intemperate controversy between Harmood and Mrs. Steptoe during the remainder of the afternoon.

No doubt Challis had treasured a hope in his heart that his wife and the children would reappear. He succeeded, to his own satisfaction, in pretending he had known they wouldn't, all along; and by the time he had reached Tulse Hill Station, believed he had only remained to lunch at Wimbledon to write important letters.

He rang more than once—two or three times more—at his mother-in-law's, without any response. The first time someone, he thought, looked from behind the blind of an upper window; and then two voices, one dictatorial, the other compliant, conversed up and down the staircase of Glenvairloch, for that was the name of Marianne's mother's villa at Tulse Hill. The next-door neighbour lived at Bannochar.

At his second ring he suspected, at his third was convinced, that non-admission was a *parti-pris*, in his case, at Glenvairloch. The dictatorial voice had been, not Marianne's, but her parent's, who, probably, had also been the scout at the window. If the household had made up its mind not to admit him, what could he

do? A scheme for burglarious entry, suggested by a boy at large, in the hope of reward, did not recommend itself. Even this boy asking the cook next door to let him through, and him to climb through a back-winder, seemed a lawless course to Challis's mind. He found, too, that this boy caused the sudden appearance from space of other boys, and that as they agglutinated round him, passers-by, apparently *crétins,* wanted to know whether it was a fire. He saw no alternative but to give it up. He did so, resolving to return next day. As it chanced, some pressing appointments made the day after more convenient.

This time he went early in the morning, hoping to effect a surprise. But he knew quite well that if no one else came to the door whose admission was *de rigueur,* he was practically at the mercy of the garrison. No portcullis need be lifted unless it chose.

A lucky chance befell, in the shape of a butcher-boy, who could not well leave a pound of steak impaled on the gate rails, nor slip three ounces of dripping into the letter-box. Taken into confidence by Challis, he said: "They'll come along for me, you bet." He knew his power, this butcher-boy; but he yelled as well as rang, from sweetness of disposition, although not bound to yell by contract. Indeed, he also shouted an exhortation: "Git them stockin's on, Hemmer, and come along! Can't wait here till Sunday!"

But Emma was really up and dressed, for it was past three o'clock. She took in the meat, and said she would ask, please, if Mrs. Challis was in. Challis raised no objection, but walked into the house beside her, for all that. You see, he was one of the family, however seldom he visited his mother-in-law. And it does not come into practice for a young servant to repulse an applicant for admission; under such circumstances, Emma had admitted Mr. Challis more than once. How could she turn on him and say, "You're not to come in this time"?

He had never been a frequent visitor at the house, though always nominally—or we might say technically—welcome. There had been little open warfare between him and its occupant since his first widowerhood, when his scanty attendances at Divine Service, conceded during his short period of married life, to keep the peace, were discontinued altogether. His perdition had then become an article of the old lady's faith; but she seemed to have decided that the Fires of Hell during the remainder of Eternity would be a sufficient penalty for her son-in-law's delinquencies, without the added sting of incivility from herself when he occa-

sionally found himself under her roof. Moreover, Challis had made a great concession in surrendering Bob to Marianne. His way of describing this surrender of his son was shockingly blasphemous; in fact, he used to indulge in parallels founded on recollections of his own short church-going experience in a way that would have estranged his second wife and her mother for ever from him had their information on the details of their own faith been equal to their conviction that they held it. As it was, the impression sometimes produced on their minds by Challis's irreverent whimsicalities was that there must be the raw material of Salvation somewhere in a person capable of repeating so many correct religious phrases. The story only dwells on these things now because Challis did so as he sat waiting for the appearance of his mother-in-law, and wondering what form her indignation would take.

He had just recollected an occasion when, after a visit to the old lady, he had said to his wife: "Really, Polly Anne, I think I produced quite a devout impression on grandmamma to-day," and her unsuspicious reply, "I thought you spoke very nicely, dear!" when the old lady herself became audible in the lobby without, mixing an asthmatic cough with reprimands to the servant.

"You *gurls!*" The speaker seemed for a moment almost paralyzed by the force of her indignation against the class she denounced. Then it burst forth in almost a shout—"WHY couldn't-you-do-as-I-told-you-and-say-your-orders-were . . .?" and so on. But the very vehemence of the fusillade that followed the artillery was suicidal, for the cough cut short what might almost have been printed as a continuous word. Then speech got a turn again, on a revised line, "Why-can't-you-do-as-you're-TOLD?" the gunshot coming this time as a wind-up. Variations followed, to the same effect.

Emma the gurl seemed of a timid and sensitive nature, prone to dissolve in sobs and sniffs. Her defence, Challis gathered, was that he had walked in through the kitchen-door, and that her troops were outflanked by such an unusual move. He felt the defence was good, and that he ought to help. He showed himself at the room-door.

"Don't scold Emma, grandmamma," said he. "It was no fault of hers. If she had given me your message fifty times over, I should have come in just the same. Where's Marianne?"

"Be good enough not to interfere between me and my servants." She had a proper spirit, this old lady, and it was shown at in-

tervals—short ones. As she mellowed with age, these intervals grew shorter.

"Well!—blow Emma up if you like, but it was no fault of hers. Where's Marianne?"

"Will you have the goodness to wait till I have done with this *gurl*?"

Challis returned into the drawing-room, and waited. Emma—he said to himself—was catching it hot. He felt in his pocket to make sure of half-a-crown, as a *solatium,* in case Emma showed him out.

Nothing lasts for ever. "Such a thing again, and you go!" was the last shot from the old lady's citadel at the servant. And her first at himself was, "Now *you!*" He accepted the challenge.

"Where is Marianne?" But an attack of coughing stopped the old woman's reply; and when it subsided, and left him free to repeat his question, he re-worded it, "Where is my wife?"

"My daughter is *not* your wife."

"Very well, grandmamma, let's pretend she isn't. Where is your daughter? Where's Marianne?"

"What do you want with her?" The speech and the speaker are sullen, dogged, and in deadly earnest. If Challis plays any impish tricks—and he isn't taking the old cat seriously; witness that malicious twinkle in his eye!—there will be an explosion, and a bad one.

"What do I want with her? Why, of course, to come back and live in Sin with me, like a dutiful wife. Stop a bit, though, grandmamma! Perhaps you don't know about Marianne's letter—the letter she left for me when she bolted off yesterday! Do you, or don't you?"

"I refuse to be catechized. I am in my daughter's confidence, and I know exactly what she has written and what she has not written." The suggestion was that Challis's report would be untrustworthy. She seemed to warm to her subject. "Marianne has told me *everything,* and she has my fullest concurrence in the step she has taken."

"Then I suppose," says Challis, with irritation, for the old lady's fangs are beginning to tell, "that you are giving your 'fullest concurrence' to her carrying away my children?"

The inverted commas in Challis's voice are caught at. "Yes—you may sneer, and you may repeat my words! You may despise me, Mr. Alfred Challis, because I am only an old woman. But I tell you this, and you can believe it or not, as you like—that in the eyes of Holy Writ those children are *not* yours, and any lawyer will tell you they are not yours."

"I don't see how more than one lawyer can vouch personally for the paternity of either of the kids."

"I don't understand you."

"Never mind! Try to understand this, and tell my wife: that whether the children are mine or anyone else's—even the most respectable legal firm's in the City!—they are *legally* mine, and I intend to have them back."

"You know as well as I do that they are *not* legally yours. You know as well as I do that when you married Kate's sister you were committing an act forbidden in Holy Writ, and expressly condemned by Our Lord Himself. You know that your children are illegitimate children, and contrary to the Act of Parliament. Do not pretend you are ignorant of this, Alfred Challis. Be truthful for once!"

"I suppose my copy of the Bible isn't a recent edition; I must get one brought up to date. Or I might order one from the *Times* Book Club. . . . Oh no!—no doubt all you say is correct. I shall find the passage." A misunderstanding occurred here, owing to the old lady's deafness. An image generated in her mind had to be dispersed, of a Club of Freethinkers who had a copy of the Scriptures, certainly, but kept it in the passage, reserving the library shelves for Mock Litanies and the like. Challis's tendency to regard the whole thing as a joke revived somewhat over this. "No, no, grandmamma," said he, with something like a laugh; "no one has had anything to say against the Book Club, so far, on the score of Unsoundness. You misunderstood me. All I meant to say was that my recollections of Holy Writ seem to want polishing up. No doubt you're right! But the notion of Marianne having any right to appropriate *my* children—*our* children—why, the idea is simply too ridiculous to bear speaking of!"

"You can ask any lawyer."

"What lawyer ever told you such rubbish?"

"Mr. Tillingfleet."

"Mr. Tillingfleet deserves to be struck off the Rolls. When did Mr. Tillingfleet make this precious statement?"

"I suppose you fancy you know better than Mr. Tillingfleet?"

"When did he tell you this?"

"I can show you his letter if you like." Letter produced. Challis muttered that *he* didn't want to see it. But he took it, and made a visible parade of superficial reading, until he came to the end, when he appeared to re-read the last paragraph. He then went back, and re-read from the beginning, half aloud, skipping words.

"'Dear Madam reply to your esteemed . . . hm-hm . . . regret must repeat advice . . . *re* matrimonial status . . . hm-hm . . . in no case can marriage of man with deceased wife's sister hold good in law, however pledged parties hold themselves . . . hm-hm. . . consequently legal dissolution impossible no legal contract existing . . . old friend of late Mr. Craik . . . excuse . . . delicate position . . . your daughter . . . counsel moderation . . . jealousy may be justified . . . may be groundless. . . .' Sensible chap, Tillingfleet!"

The widow of the late Mr. Craik snorted. "He was my husband's legal adviser," said she. How could he be other than a sensible chap?—said the snort. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to give your attention to what he says about Marianne's children."

"About our children, certainly!" Challis continued, reading more distinctly. "'With regard to your other question as to the relative claims of your son-in-law and daughter to the guardianship of their children, I am personally of opinion that as no legal marriage exists, the children are technically illegitimate, and this technical illegitimacy would bar any claim to guardianship on the part of Mr. Challis. How far any claim for maintenance could be sustained is another question, Mrs. Challis's object being, as I understand, to withdraw the children entirely from their father. On the justifiability of such a course I do not understand that my opinion is asked.' Sensible fellow, Tillingfleet!" said the reader. But with so plain a meaning that his hearer caught him up sharply.

"What do you mean to imply?"

"That Mr. Tillingfleet thinks you and Marianne a couple of fools. He all but says that your behaviour is unjustifiable, in his opinion. . . ."

"His opinion was not asked."

"So he says. Hadn't you better ask him?"

"Certainly not. He does not know how you have behaved to your wife. It is a matter of which she alone can judge."

"How have I behaved to my wife?"

"You know, as well as I do."

"No doubt, and a great deal better. But you don't know as well as I do."

"I do not wish to talk any further. Have you anything further to say?"

"I wish to see Marianne and the children, and to know when they are coming home."

"I am here to speak for Marianne. She refuses to see you, or to give up her children to you. You will gain nothing by remaining here."

"Come, grandmamma, do be a little Christian-like, and help to make things comfortable again. . . ."

"Christian-like indeed! What next?"

"Perhaps I used the wrong word. Couldn't you manage a little Heathenism for once, and be jolly? At any rate, grandmamma, tell me what the accusation is. The worst criminals are allowed to hear the indictment." Challis was just a shade uncandid in this, because he believed he knew the worst of the indictment. But he excused his conscience on the score of his right to any means of finding out whether his character, sadly soiled by that unfortunate letter business, had not been well smudged over with soot by Mrs. Eldridge into the bargain.

This conversation will have shown that grandmamma, though she had achieved a narrow-mindedness of a very choice quality, while preserving a virgin ignorance of the meaning of the popular teaching, or perversion of teaching, by which vernacular bigotries are usually fostered and nourished, was by no means a stupid person when she had an end to gain. Whether her end in the present case was the final separation of Marianne from her husband may be questioned. A working hypothesis of her motives might be that she merely wished to pay her son-in-law out for the slights he was always heaping—as she knew, while she could not understand or answer them—on her cherished booth in Vanity Fair. Whatever her ultimate object, she was unable to resist the opportunity of hitting hard that the culprit's application to hear the indictment afforded her.

"What the accusation is!" she echoed derisively. "Ask your Miss Judith what the accusation is. Ask *her,* and then look me in the face, Mr. Alfred Challis!" The old lady seemed quite vain of this formula of denunciation, for she picked up the missile and reloaded her arbalast. "Ask your fashionable friends—oh yes!—they look the other way, no doubt, but they have eyes in their heads, and can see for all that. Ask *them,* and *then* look me in the face, Mr. Alfred Challis! Ask your neighbours. . . ."

"Mrs. Charlotte Eldridge?" asked Challis sharply.

"*No,* Alfred Challis!—not Mrs. Charlotte Eldridge only, but *all* the neighbours—ask them *all!* Ask them to say what *they've* seen. . . ." But the good lady lost the luxury of her climax this time, because Challis interrupted.

"Could you mention any responsible householder who would tell

me what I am accused of? I could call on my way back." Being thoroughly angry himself, he naturally spoke in a way that he knew would exasperate. This dry kind of speech was like a red rag to a bull in this old lady's case. Nothing is more infuriating than one's adversary's apparent contentment with mere words, left alone with their syntax, to shift for themselves. It makes one so conscious of one's own war-whoops, and one's occasional faulty expression of meaning, during attacks of uncontrolled anger.

"I am prepared for any evasion and prevarication from you, Alfred Challis. But I was not prepared—no, I was *not* prepared—for such an unblushing statement that you are kept in ignorance. Have I not told you plainly—have I not told you repeatedly—that this Miss Judith Arkroyd is what is complained of? Have I disguised anything? What I have said is the shameful, disgraceful *truth*. The TRUTH, Alfred Challis! Down on your knees and acknowledge it!" A bouquet of vital doctrines essential to salvation hung about this; the attitude of kneeling was especially telling. More of the same sort followed.

When a lull came, Challis spoke. "Am I to see Marianne, or am I not?" said he. "I am convinced she is here, and I have a right to see her." The old woman kept glum silence, and he repeated his words. Then she said: "You shall not see her. It is no use. You had better go." He then said, "I know she is here, because I saw her blue silk sunshade in the entry," and left the room, as though to verify his observation. At the stair-foot he paused, and called aloud to his wife: "Polly Anne, Polly Anne! Are you there?" No answer came, and then the old woman came running out, quite inarticulate with rage and coughing.

"Listen to me," said he, and his manner stopped her. "I am going. But you will do well to pay attention to what I am going to say to you. If you repeat any impudent falsehoods about Miss Arkroyd or any other lady—yes!—whether you make them yourself or get them from any other pigsty or gutter, you will place yourself within reach of the law. You had better talk to Tillingfleet about it. He seems a sensible chap. At any rate, he will be able to tell you that people have been ruined before now by the damages they have had to pay for circulating filthy slanders without foundation. So be careful, grandmamma! Good-night!"

He had been so self-restrained up to the moment when his anger broke out in speech that his worthy mother-in-law was taken com-

pletely aback by it. She remained so until the door closed behind him. It was then too late for any demonstration, and the disappointed guardian of family morals fell back into the house gobbling like a turkey-cock. Challis found Emma at the garden-gate, and gave her her half-crown of consolation. He received the impression that she had been sent out with orders to warn Martha and the children should they return, and head them off in time to prevent a meeting. He was afterwards sorry he had not entered into conversation with this girl, and made a friend of her. But the truth is it was impossible for his mind to receive the idea that his wife's resolution would be a lasting one; and he felt confident of a penitent letter in a day or two, and an *amende honorable* to himself, whether he deserved one or not, for suspicions which he persisted in looking at as false *per se*, although one or two circumstances, quite outside their radius, might be coaxed into court by a malicious prosecution to testify against him. Any other anticipation was mere nightmare.

But a day passed, and another, and many postmen's knocks, each with its exasperation of hope frustrated, and many cabs, that might have ended in the voices of the children shouting to the cabman, by permission, which gate to stop at. And a loneliness indescribable, so unlike the happy empty days one gets for work now and again when one's housemates troop away to some assured haven elsewhere, and write every day, if it's only a postcard. How Challis envied the splendid self-absorption of our old friend the cat! How he envied the sound of a happy freedom in the chronic controversy of the kitchen; always the same controversy, but possibly on various subjects! How happy the tradesmen's boys seemed!—how callous to the smallness of the orders!

Every day he wrote a line to Marianne, ignoring all that had passed. She would give way in time. If he persevered, one day she would be unable to resist the temptation to reply; it would be a sort of hypnotic suggestion, mechanically brought about. It was on the day after his last visit to Tulse Hill that he made up his mind to try whether a letter to Judith would not procure one from her that would do some good. It could not make matters worse.

Oh, this strangely compounded clay, Man!—that any story should have to tell it! But it is true, too. This Alfred Challis, who, face to face with such grim reality of wreck at home, had as good as escaped from subjection to the witchcraft that had brought it about, had no sooner taken up his pen to write to its author, than he was again subject to the experience that has been

spoken of as the soul-brush. All his consciousness—which was intense—of his own folly could not prevent him attaching a special force to the first words of his letter. Surely "Dear Miss Arkroyd" might have been a pure formality, just as much as "Dear Grandmamma" would have been if he had brought himself to write to that veteran practitioner in discord-brewing. It was no such thing. A magic hung about the three words, with a suggestion in it of a phrase of music, or a whiff of burnt incense. The image of Judith crept back promptly into his mind at permission given, suggesting disloyalties to his hope that Marianne would quarrel with her mamma, and take a reasonable view of the position—come back and reinstate life.

Why, in Heaven's name—he half asked himself—if it was to be like this, if Marianne was going to persist in her unreasonable jealousy, should not he take advantage of the freedom she forced upon him, of the legal pretext of an irregular marriage that assumed the right of Law and Usage to cancel a promise given and taken mutually, believed by each giver to come from the heart of the other? He would have flung from him angrily any suggestion of an advantage to come to himself from capping to a dirty Orthodoxy—the words are his, not the story's—from any joining in the World's dance; any acquiescence in the mops and mows of the Performing Classes; any obeisance to a great organization which—when it suited him—he chose to consider a mere mechanism for keeping the funds up and the fun going, and the distribution among the sanctioned of unlimited stars and garters and loaves and fishes. But if it were forced upon him in the face of his persistent repudiation of it, if the other contracting party flaunted it in his face, might not he avail himself of this pretext?—use a disgraceful shuffle in the service of truth? Was he not almost in honour bound to do so, to that lady from whom his evasive declaration of passion had elicited what was at least a strong disclaimer of indifference to himself?

But Challis only half asked himself these questions, because he knew the answer. He knew that he knew the difference between Right and Wrong, and he knew that his wife had Right on her side—not much, but some—and he suspected that he had Wrong on his—not some, but much. So he finished his letter to Judith and posted it.

Judith wrote in answer to Challis's letter, and he forwarded an enclosure it contained, addressed to his wife. It was returned to him, torn in three or four pieces, by the next post. He joined it up and read it, and thought it the most sweet, conciliatory,

angelic human document he had ever read. But, then, he was a man!

He went more than once to Tulse Hill after this, without succeeding in seeing Marianne. The third time he found the house empty, placed in the hands of an agent, who said in reply to all inquiries that his instructions were limited to dealing with the house. He was, he said, a House-Agent. But he would undertake that letters should be forwarded. He evidently enjoyed being civil, so satiated was he with the offensiveness of his position.

Mrs. Eldridge called on him as a peacemaker, having in tow her husband, who winked at him over her shoulder, uninterpretably. He said to her, subduing his anger well: "I would not have seen you, Charlotte Eldridge, if there had not been something I have been wishing to say to you. I cannot prove it, but I am as certain of it as that I stand here that it is you that have poisoned my wife's mind against me, and have filled it with every sort of nasty misinterpretation of a perfectly innocent friendship. You have known absolutely nothing of the lady whom you have thought fit to malign as a means of maligning me. . . . No, I know I have no means of knowing that you have ever said a single word against her. But my object in seeing you is to tell you that I am convinced that you have. I am convinced that Marianne has shown you my correspondence without any warranty—and for that she may be to blame—and that you have read into it meanings she never would have dreamed of ascribing to it, left to herself. I am, in short, sure that it is you—you—you at the bottom of all this mischief, and I tell you honestly that after you have left this door I shall not be sorry if I never see you or hear of you again. Good-bye!"

Mrs. Eldridge had thrown in denials; and when her husband, moved to eloquence, had interposed with "Come, I say now, Master Titus, ain't 'nasty misinterpretation' coming it rather strong?" had briefly directed him to be quiet till he was spoken to. She had then placed herself on oath, offering an extemporized solemnity if called on. "I am ready to go down on my knees here and now, Alfred Challis, and to call on God, who will one day be your judge and mine, to bear witness that this is a *cruel falsehood!* HE knows"—here she threw in upper-case type freely—"that all my wish, all my effort, has been towards conciliation and peace. . . ."

At this point Challis interrupted her, saying curtly: "Then your efforts have not been very successful. I do not see that we

shall gain anything by talking any more about it. Good-bye again!" This occurred before the exodus from Glenvairloch, or Challis might have been less unconciliatory, with an eye to keeping open a possible channel of communication with his wife, even though it would involve communication with a woman whom he now thoroughly detested.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE EMPTY HERMITAGE. A COMPROMISE ABOUT BOB. HOW MRS. STEPTOE HAD NOTHING TO CONCEAL. HOW CINTILLA CAUGHT MR. CHALLIS. CALYPSO'S RUG ISLAND. GOOD-BYE! PROMISE NOT TO COME TO BIARRITZ! THE SKEIN WOUND

THE unhappy author hung on persistently at the Hermitage, in the face of the candid neglect of every duty by the servant who had given warning, and the uncandid pretences of Mrs. Steptoe that, in the absence of her mistress, which she treated as a thing *de die in diem*, the one object of her life, deep-rooted in her heart of hearts, was the comfort and well-being of her master. Her catering took the form so common in the British household, of a joint twice a week, twice re-incarnate as hash and mince, and a nice little bit of rump-steak on the odd day out. Her potatoes were hygrometric, owing to their being the wrong sort—there was great latitude for physical defect in that! Her other vegetables—lettuce, cabbage, what not!—had all lost their hearts, whatever was not stalk being flamboyant exfoliation. Even her brockilo sprouts were diffuse, and her cauliflowers wept. The bread was always second-hand—owing to the price of flour, said the baker's man, and he knew—and The Cheese was an affliction, a nightmare, which was supposed to be American or Cheddar, but whose days in the States or in Somersetshire were long, long ago.

Why did Challis endure it, when he might have thrown off all disguise and lived at his Club, where there is a capital library to write in, which nobody ever uses? Simply because of a pleasant dream he flattered his mind with, of a cab with luggage atop, and a sort of revised Marianne alighting, and the voices of his children. He was lying low for the fulfilment of this dream, without ever saying aloud to his heart that it was a possibility. Or, rather, he was fending against her return to the damper of an empty house. That would be altogether too sickening.

It was horribly dreary in the empty house. How he would have rejoiced to hear but one short torrent of unruly fury, but one complaining whimper, from the unrevised Marianne of the past! But he was given over to the Silences and the intermittent sounds that drive them home—the tradesmen's boys—the postmen's

knocks. This could not last for ever, though! Bob would be back from school—was overdue, in fact—and then he would keep watch and ward in his father's absence. Challis favoured an image in his mind of a hospitable Bob, welcoming his revised stepmother, and risking statements about his father's return in fabulously short periods. He devised a plan for Bob to ring him up at the Club from the call-station at East Putney.

He had a bad half-hour when Bob did return, knowing nothing, and found him the sole tenant of the Hermitage. He thought it best to take his stand on Mrs. Steptoe's security of indefinite tomorrows, treat the matter lightly, and assure Bob that his mater and sisters would come back in the course of a few days. Bob accepted the statement in view of the fact that he didn't know yet that his phonograph, reluctantly forsaken when he returned to school, had not suffered from neglect. Presently Challis heard the diseased voice of the hideous instrument, dwelling on the fascinations of a yellow girl; and, for once, felt grateful to its inventor. But it was only a short respite. Bob soon suspected something seriously wrong, and had to be told. Not the whole!—that was impossible; what could his father have told him? But he had to have his painful experience of a first family disruption, and to understand that the sort of thing that might happen in other chaps' homes was also possible in his own.

Challis, who was still writing disheartened letters to his wife, addressing them through the Tulse Hill house-agency, told of Bob's return, and earnestly begged her to make it possible for the boy to see his little sisters again. He received an answer, reposted by the agent, with only the Tulse Hill postmark. It was written by her mother, and contained a proposal for a sort of truce as far as Bob was concerned. Subject to a written guarantee that he himself would keep his distance, Bob might come. Then he wrote earnestly and at length, dwelling on the cruelty of his wife's misjudgment of his actions, reproaching her with meanly taking advantage of a legal pretext to deprive him of his children, and imploring her, for their sake and his, only to consent to one interview. He was horribly embarrassed in writing this letter by the unwritten law—so his mind named it as he wrote—which dictates that every word that is written or spoken on this odious subject of men and women must be an equivocation or a shuffle. How could he formulate a phrase that would convey the truth to Marianne; acknowledge his aberration, and define its extent, without letting loose the whole gutter-brood of Charlotte Eldridges to

point the finger of denunciation at him; and, worst of all, to squirt at Judith, skunk-wise, and run away? And if he assumed what so many would be ready to accept as a sound view, that an attack of amorous intoxication didn't count, and denied fully and roundly that he had ever been guilty of any transgression at all—why, then, in the first place it would be a lie, in the second, the troop of skunks would only resort to another secretion. "You know, dear, a man always holds himself bound to deny, for the woman's sake." It was characteristic of Challis that he all but heard these words from the image his mind made of Charlotte Eldridge on a sofa, shading its eyes from the light with that confounded pretty hand of hers. "I see no way out of Charlotte Eldridge," said he in despair. He ended his letter by an ill-chosen phrase, which put his head in the lion's mouth. "Is a man never to be forgiven," it said, "because he is momentarily overtaken by passion for a lady under exceptional circumstances?" Mrs. Eldridge made her teeth meet over that expression, be sure of that!

The outcome of the negotiations that followed was that Bob spent the last half of his long vacation with his mater and sisters and grandmamma at Broadstairs, which was the place of retirement chosen by the last-named lady, to be out of her son-in-law's way. It was recognized by Mrs. Steptoe when Master Bob said where he was a-going.

"Well, now, Master Robert, to think you should go to Broadstairs of all places in the world! That near Ramsgate it is!"

"No, it isn't!" said Bob. "It's near Margate. I'm right, and you're wrong." But a compromise was effected over a railway-map in Bradshaw, very much tore across.

"That is where I saw your dear mamma, Master Robert, afore ever you was born or thought of. Ramsgate!"

The amenities of controversy were not Bob's strong point. He gave a prolonged shout of derision. "*You* never saw *my* dear mamma! Why, she died before I was born!" It was a hastily constructed sentence, and reflected very little credit on Rugby. You may recall Stony Stratford, and the way some person suffered from insect-bites there?

But Mrs. Steptoe repeated her statement, firmly but respectfully. Not only had she seen Bob's mamma, but his papa. "Very well, then, I'll tell the Governor," said Bob, and kept his word before he took his departure, two days later.

"What's this story my boy has, Mrs. Steptoe, about your seeing his mother and me at Ramsgate?" It was Sunday morning, and

Challis was pretending to look at a series of volumes known as "The Books," in each of which a string of misstatements appeared, sanctioned at intervals by a rubber stamp. Challis made some pretence of adding up a total, to give Mrs. Steptoe time, and then repeated his question. "Yes—Master Bob. About Ramsgate. Where were *you*? *I* can't recollect you." His mind was seeking some younger Mrs. Steptoe among the children on the sands, far away from her lodging-house.

"You hardly would, sir!" said she. "I was attending to the house where you was visiting. I had undertook the cooking at my aunt's sister's—name of Cantrip. . . ."

"Can't recollect Cantrip."

"No, sir, not likely! But perhaps Hallock? . . . name of lady and gentleman stoppin' the season. . . . Coal-merchant, I believe, in a considerable way of business." This to keep the whole transaction on its proper level in Society.

"I remember Hallock," says Challis, reminiscent. "Man lost his hat over the cliff! . . . Oh yes—but I remember!—it was his house we dined at. . . ."

"That was the occasion, sir. . . . The Baker desired me to say, sir, that he was sorry, but it should not occur again. . . ."

"Never mind the Baker now, Mrs. Steptoe. Tell me about Mr. Hallock. I can't remember you, but I suppose you were there?"

"Not all along, but in and out of the room. I was divided with the kitchen. I remember the young lady very well." Mrs. Steptoe felt it would be safer to leave the young lady's name alone. The ground was shaky under her feet. In fact, she would rather the matter should never have come to Challis's knowledge.

His perception was growing of the oddity of Mrs. Steptoe knowing anything about it. "*I* can't understand," he said. "That youngster said you saw *his mother*. How came you to know the young lady was . . . how came you to connect . . ." He hesitated over the description of Kate. To say "the lady whom I subsequently married" would have been making Mrs. Steptoe too much of a family *confidante*.

Now, that good woman had no objection to being of importance, but she wanted to keep safe, first and foremost. She had nothing to confess to personally; was, in fact, blameless. Why not simply tell all she knew? She took that course, telling all that happened about the photograph, but suggesting that the whole occurrence had been slight, trivial, colloquial—rather than otherwise hinting at surprise that Mr. Challis had known nothing about it. Why

had she not told him? He made the inquiry, but interrupted her disclaimer of any *locus standi* in the matter, with an admission that he had asked a nonsensical question. Why *should* she have done anything but hold her tongue? She was quite an outsider. Well!—leave her outside. That was the obvious course.

"Thank you, Mrs. Steptoe," said Challis. "I fancy I remember that photograph. . . . Oh, the Baker!—yes! Tell him to be very careful that it doesn't occur again. . . . No, nothing else. That's all; good-morning!"

But his face, always grave now, was graver than ever as he hunted through the photograph albums he disinterred from the chiffonier Charlotte Eldridge had exploited so successfully, and got no success for himself. He found what he supposed to be the spaces these Ramsgate portraits had occupied, but nothing in them. They were two or three sudden blanks in a well-packed book. Marianne had taken them away.

For the first time since the rupture he felt undisguisedly angry with his wife. It was too bad!—what had he done that she should be so secretive and mistrustful? Why could she not frankly ask him for an explanation? After all, it was a subject he would have been so glad she should be in his confidence about, and one he had only kept back from her to spare her a needless disquiet. To get absolution for himself he resumed the whole story of his silence and its reasons. He failed to see how differently the thing had presented itself to her.

What would Kate have said to him—thought of him—if, when he first came to her mother's house, he had made a clean breast of the whole story to any of the family! As long as she kept silence, surely he was bound to do so? And then, when Kate was in her grave, or in Heaven, according to the immediate exigency of speech-without-thought among believers in God-knows-what—all this is Challis's language—when, anyhow, her demise had qualified her to be spoken of in a hushed voice, was he to intrude a revelation of a transaction that would have been at least out of keeping with the ideal Marianne's memory had made of a beloved and lamented elder sister? Then, as time went on, and no one seemed a penny the worse that the whole thing should be forgotten, the lock that shut the secret in got rusty, as such locks do, and Challis felt far from certain that he could turn the key at all, if he tried.

Besides, for this last five years there had been another cause for silence. Challis had not been entirely without tidings of the man Keith Horne in his subsequent career. He had identified him—to his own satisfaction, at least—with the central figure of a

hideous story told to him by a gaol-chaplain, an observer to whom he was indebted for much material for copy of a most popular sort. This particular atrocity was unfit for publication, even in a modern novel, and made Challis feel grateful to its miserable perpetrator for what would otherwise have been the crowning act in a series of betrayals. He sometimes even felt uncertain whether he ought not to feel unreserved thankfulness, and ascribe credit to him for what may have been the only noble motive of his life. He had endeavoured to trace the ex-convict, but without success.

Perhaps the way in which Challis regarded this man's relation with his first wife and himself may suggest itself from the gaol-chaplain's having laid great stress on the interest this man excited in his colleague, the surgeon of the gaol. If the patching up of an absolutely rotten profligate, that he might complete a term of penal servitude and return to his sins, was a thing to be desired, then that surgeon had a right to his triumph. That does not come into the story. But those who have given any attention to the pathology of disorders incidental to the ways of destroying body and soul adopted by this wretched creature will be able to understand why every year that added to Master Bob's stature, and increased his impudence, without a trace of any visible taint of constitution, was one more nail in the coffin of a painful misgiving, which Challis was only too glad should never have been shared by the mother of Bob's sisters. As Marianne never came to a knowledge of the ugly story, we may dismiss it finally, having only cited it because it appears to supply a justification of Challis's persistent concealment from her of her sister's former marriage.

The story draws a long breath of relief as it returns to Bob, who had come back from school fuming with an uncharitable jealousy against a boy named Tillotson, who had two Camberwell Beauties, while Bob had only one. So the few days he spent at home were chiefly employed tearing over Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park with a butterfly-net in a tropical heat. Then he ate his dinner too fast, and rushed away to his phonograph, at whose maw he gloated over incidents of Love and Jealousy in the plantations of Louisiana. As his father allowed him to do exactly what he liked, he was able to give full vent to his devotion to this pestilent abomination. He even wound it up to stand at his bed's head and soothe his first sleep with "Bill Bailey."

But when Bob departed for Broadstairs, the desolation was worse than ever. Challis met it boldly, writing persistently all day, and spending the evening at his Club. He was rather glad

town was so empty; for, indeed, a week or so after the boy said good-bye to his governor, hugging him as a French or Italian boy would have done, no two folk who met seemed ready to accept each other as actual. "You don't mean to say *you're* here!" was the commonest greeting. But the incredulity of each gave way before the other's attestation of his existence.

Challis's disbelief in the presence in Grosvenor Square of any of The Family was so strong that he had no misgivings whatever on the point when he knocked at the door with drawn cards in his hand, and set phrases of inquiry on his tongue. He felt so reassured by the opacity of the closed windows, parading the emptiness of the mansion, and the *insouciance* of the nondescript who looked up from the area at him before coming to the door, that he never doubted that his visit would end as he himself at any rate believed he intended it to do. Was he glad or sorry—did he know himself?—when a light step caught him up at the street-corner, and a musical voice said, "Oh, please, Mr. Challis!" It was Cintilla.

Cintilla and Challis had always been on the most familiar terms, so if he did take her dimpled chin between his thumb and forefinger before saying, "Oh, please what, Miss Tenterden?" the butcher's boy need not have pretended to look the other way ostentatiously. Tenterden, by-the-bye, was the little maid's real name —Clemency Tenterden.

"Please I was to catch you and bring you back for Miss Judith."

"You don't mean that Miss Judith is in town?"

"Oh *no!*—not *really* in town. Why, you should see the state the house is in! And Mrs. Protheroe has gone to her brother James's widow at Bridport." Mrs. Protheroe was the housekeeper.

"We won't dispute about terms, Miss Tenterden. I gather that Miss Judith is not technically in town. I suppose she's going on somewhere—that's it, isn't it?"

"Oh yes—and, please, it's such fun, Mr. Challis. She's going to Biarritz to stay, and take me, and I'm to learn to speak French." Evidently there was one little maid in this world having a high old time, and determined to make the most of it.

There was an island on a rug in the back-parlour—the sole outbreak of visible furniture in a wilderness of brown holland, and rolled-up carpets, and chandeliers in bags, and pictures whose backs provoked an interest none had ever felt in their faces. "Like some females," thought Challis, as he picked his way to the

island through the *débris*. On the island was its Calypso, the only member of The Family in town.

Judith was as beautiful as ever, as she extended both hands to him. "I'm so glad the child caught you, Scroop," said she. Absolute self-possession!—Estrildis herself could not have been more collected. "But I'm sorry for things. Now sit down and let us talk reasonably. . . . Yes—there!" This was to Cintilla, fixing a nicely chosen distance for Challis, neither too far nor too near. Cintilla would have liked to supply a chair a little nearer; she had no idea of people being so artificial.

Challis's self-possession was far from absolute. In fact, he was tremulous. "You were good to send that letter," he said. But the last word sounded like "letterm," as he checked his speech short.

"You were going to say 'Miss Arkroyd,'" said she. "At least, do not let us be prigs. Call me Judith—at least, for now."

Could it matter, either way? "You were good to send that letter, Judith," he repeated. "But, as I told you, it did no good—has done no good." For he had written as much, and some more, to Royd. But his pen had always stopped short of a full account of his desolation.

"I suppose we're all human," said she absently; and the remark seemed to want application. "What leads you to suppose she will never forgive you? What she says?" Challis shook his head. "Her manner? . . . No?—then what?"

"You don't understand. . . . Well!—I have never told you, certainly. Marianne . . . I have never succeeded in seeing her. She and her mother have gone away from London, and in order that my boy may not be separated from his sisters, I have been obliged to promise not to follow them." He explained the position more fully.

Judith laughed, and Challis heard nothing sinister in her laugh. But, then, he was on Calypso's island.

"You are too soft-hearted, Scroop. Really, you must forgive my laughing! But you are so very—Arcadian!" Challis waited visibly for an explanation. "Couldn't you see that what this dear good woman will want, when she gets tired, will be a golden bridge to come back across? Something to save her face! *She'll* never admit she was wrong. But for the sake of the children, don't you see? We are in the region of high unselfish motive at once."

Marianne would never admit she was wrong! Very likely; but the point was, was she wrong? Challis caught himself almost taking sides with Penelope against Calypso. The point was danger-point in these seas. Never was a stranger clash in a

human soul than the one Challis was conscious of when he half resented the tone in which the woman he had a passion for spoke of the one for whom he had an affection. We had nearly written "the one whom he loved." But surely he loved Judith?—or what is the vocabulary of the Poets worth? The ambiguities of language have been beforehand with the story, and it cannot stop to *préciser* them.

"Marianne will not persist a moment after she is convinced she is wrong." He spoke a little stiffly—almost a mild censure of Calypso. But as a set-off he took for granted that Penelope *was* wrong, past contention.

"Perhaps I should have said she will never *believe* she was wrong. Better than 'admit.'" This was spoken with placid indifference. One might have thought the speaker absorbed in the flashing of brilliants on the beautiful hand she was holding to catch a sunset-ray from the back-window; the palm, as she shifted it about, showing each finger outlined with transmitted rosy light. Challis tried to reason away its witchery—to quash its jurisdiction. But it was a fatal hand. "Go on telling me," said its owner. "Tell me more about Marianne. What do you suppose she thinks?"

"I have no right to suppose she thinks any more than she said in her letter. I told you in my letter all I think I had any right to repeat."

"And I have no right to be inquisitive. But the letter spoke plainly. I am convinced of it."

"The letter was indignant with me for showing *her* letter to you before, as she supposed, I had read it myself."

"Before, as she supposed." This was mere repetition of the phrase, as a writer from dictation might have spoken. She turned her eyes full on him. "You *hadn't* read it, Scroop," she said.

"I had to the best of my belief, at the time I showed it to you." He is a little nettled, and she sees it. He embarks on self-justification—a thing one should never do. "There was not a single word in what I supposed the letter contained that you might not have read. My statement that I had not read the words on the back was entitled to some consideration. *I* never put anything of importance away in a postscript, where it may be overlooked." He stopped abruptly, feeling irrelevant.

"Because you are an eminent author! We mustn't forget that." Judith's laugh lightened the conversation. "No, no, Scroop! you haven't got a leg to stand on, and you had better admit it. You oughtn't to have shown me the letter."

"Very well—admitted! But admit, too, that I have made amends as far as I could. It seems to me that a mountain has been made out of a molehill . . ."

Challis stopped suddenly, very ill at his ease. Judith, with a look half amused, half expectant, waited. She evidently was not going to help. Indeed, she would not have found it easy. Each knew that the conversation was being sustained artificially by attaching undue weight to the fact that Marianne's sole ground of complaint was this showing of her letter. Each knew how much more there was behind; how strong Marianne's indictment might have been with a full knowledge of the facts. After all, this blaming her for unjust action, on imperfect data, which would have been just had the whole come to light, was the merest quibble, and both knew it.

Judith broke the silence first, but only with what amounted to a declaration that she would not help. "There must be a beautiful sunset somewhere," was all it came to. And then matters were relieved by the silvery voice of Cintilla. Might she take away the tea-things? Yes—she might. While she did so, the talk turned on the legal question of Marianne's right to capture the children. Challis had, he said, consulted more than one legal friend on the subject, and they were all in a tale. The children were illegitimate, and *therefore* belonged to their mother. He got some satisfaction, evidently, from shredding a conspicuous absurdity of human law—why should children be claimable at all by a father who was a mere predecessor *et præterea nihil*—just a parent? He himself had made his title good to these two kids by his share in fostering them. Had his claim been a legal one only, he would have foregone it to make way for that of their natural owner. But he touched the matter very lightly. It did not outlast the removal of the tea-things.

Then Judith, going to the window, stood looking out, watching the light die from a cloud whose under side had broken into ridges of rosy flame. Its last ridge no longer saw the sun, when she turned slowly, coming back to a seat nearer Challis than the one she had occupied.

"This will be good-bye," she said. "I am going to Biarritz, and shall be away till January certainly. I did not want to go without seeing you again. So I was glad when the child came running up to say it was you, and shouldn't she catch you?" Her speech was redolent of self-command; no concessions to the pathos of parting.

"May I write to you?"

"I was going to ask you to do so. I shall hope to hear that your home is happy again, and that all goes well. This sort of thing has happened before—oh dear, how often!"

As Challis sat during the short silence that followed, not looking at all at his companion, one might almost have fancied that he shrank away from her, as one afraid. He found a voice to answer her, but not easily.

"I will write," he said. "And, believe me, Judith, in what I am going to say now I am speaking truth. I look with hope to the softening of my poor wife's heart, to the sound of her return to my empty home, and the voices of my babies. . . ."

"Why should you suppose I doubt you? Of course you do!"

"Yes, but, dearest!—I must call you so, or call you something with some heart in it; pardon me!—can I tell the reason? Can the reason be told? . . . Oh yes, of course, I know what you are going to say—it is reason enough that she *is* my wife, that the kids are *my* kids, that the home is my home. So it is; but there is more reason than that, and I am at a loss to tell it. . . . What?"

But Judith left whatever it was unsaid, and exchanged it for "No—go on!"

"Perhaps I do wrong when I use the only words I can find when I say that I long for Marianne back again to help me against *you*? Ought I not to say to help me against myself? Where is the fault in you that you are what you are? *You* are blameless, at least. It is *I* that must needs love you!"

And perhaps the story does wrong to allow a suspicion that, in the heart that beautiful face belonged to, was a half-formed thought that the speaker was even more Arcadian than the owner of both had suspected. But it creeps in—this suspicion—with the telling of a smile kept under by lips on the watch to check it. One thing may be relied on: Miss Arkroyd was not the least agitated.

Challis saw nothing of her face, as he never raised his eyes, and his face was half averted. He continued: "I cannot help an experience that no one will believe. I have no appeal against it. But I tell you this—that when I came home after . . . after that evening at Royd, when I forgot myself and told the truth, for a few hours I forgot *you* too. As I sit here now, it seems to me a thing absolutely incredible. Even when Marianne turned against me on grounds that seemed to me almost a pretext, no memory of you or my folly—call it so if you will—anything you like!—no memory came back to me. Indeed, it is almost as though I had been two men by turns." He raised his eyes to hers, with a slowly drawn breath, as of fatigue, from the turmoil of his own feelings.

If there was any of the smile left then, she was in time to cancel it.

But she hardly said anything. A mere run of the vowels of a sentence, as one speaks through a yawn, is not speech. It just made him say "What?" but evidently had no share in the question she replied to him with, and stopped in the middle of, "And what was it then made you? . . ." But the words she had decided on ignoring were "How funny men are!" Let us hope there was some affectation of indifference in this.

Challis understood her question. "What made my disorder break out again?" he repeated. "I can't fix the time. But now that I have been forced to discard one of my selves—the one that hoped for the calm of his old home life again . . . no, Judith, indeed there have been many happy times. . . ."

"Why? Did you think I doubted it?"

"I wasn't sure. . . . But I had not finished. Now that my hope has been simply strangled, I have to be my other self, in self-defence. I tell you—I must tell you—that the thought of you is with me every hour of the day, and what have I to help me to fight against it? Even my boy is away, and what adds to the cruelty of the position is that, will I nill I, I have to feel glad of his absence. Because when he was with me I was in constant terror of being asked for explanations which I could not give. A girl of his age would have been far easier to tell it to."

"Do you think so? I feel as if I could tell him about it all—much, much easier!" During some chat over the fact, and its strangeness, that the tongue of either sex is freest in speech with its opposite, on this one particular subject of Love, Challis felt, as they sat on in the growing twilight, that the soul-brush was at work again with a vengeance. The utter satisfaction of his thirst for speech about himself and his plight was so much sheer nectar to him while it lasted. If he paid for it after, at least his draught should be a deep one now. He confessed to the extent to which his constant home-life in the past had stood in the way of the formation of intimate friendships, and that he really had no one he could confide in. "I have a second cousin," said he—he was always absurd, sooner or later—"who has an impediment and a wig, and is slightly deaf. No, I really could *not* take him into my confidence." Judith said: "Of course you couldn't; I see that." "Besides," he continued, "he wears spats, and goes through courses of treatment for dyspepsia at Cheltenham." And Judith said again: "I see."

"The only man I have spoken to about it," continued Challis,

"is Athelstan Taylor. Well, I suppose he's about the only man I know that I *could* speak to. You know he came to see me straight away. You told him?"

"Yes, I told him. I showed him my letter—the one I wrote to your wife. He said I could not possibly write a better one. And she tore it up and sent it back?"

"She did. You know he went to try and see her, and only succeeded in getting at the old hag, her mother. I had built on his being a parson—thought it might be some use for once. But I suppose he was the wrong sort somehow—out of the wrong *cuvée*."

"Did he give offence over the—the Deceased Wife's Sister question?"

"Why, yes! The hag said he ought to be unfrocked for saying he didn't care a straw about the legal question, and only wanted to clear up what seemed a painful misunderstanding. The cloth fell through, and the old body drove him out with religious hoots."

"There's a thing you won't mind my asking? . . ."

"Go on!"

"People are saying—political people—that the Bill will pass the Lords next summer, and that then all past marriages of the sort will be legalized, because it will be *retrospective*—I believe that's the proper word. Suppose it passes, what shall you do then?"

"Get the kids back, of course! And then Polly Anne will come to her senses. But she will—she will, you know—before that."

"Suppose she laid claim to having annulled her marriage, while she still had a legal right to do so?"

"It wouldn't be allowed. She's a woman. Women's claims are not allowed in law-courts. It's heads Law wins, tails they lose . . . Yes!—I should stoop to take advantage of it in this case."

"Perhaps you would be right, this once. We must hope it will pass."

"I do hope it—with most of my heart. Do you believe me? Can you believe me, in the face of what I have said to you?" For Challis knew quite well that this profession of a hope was only what he knew he would be able to say when the soul-brush stopped, and that he said it now mechanically. Wait till he was off Calypso's island!

Judith left his question unanswered; put it aside, rather. "I suppose you know it's all settled about Frank and Sibyl?" she said. Oh yes—Challis knew. When would it be? As soon after Christmas as possible, Judith supposed. An interruption—Cintilla with a letter—was not unwelcome. But she needn't light up;

when Mr. Challis was gone would do. "That was a broad hint, Scroop," said Calypso, lying back in her chair with the unopened letter in that destructive hand fallen idly on her lap.

But in a few moments, when he took the hint and made a move towards departure, she rose. And if the truth must be told, she went quite as near a good stretch and a shake as such high breeding as hers could allow itself. It did not matter; her grace and beauty, perhaps her dressmaker, negatived the action. That bodice was perfect in cut. "You know, Scroop, that this *is* good-bye?" she said. And then in reply to his assent: "We won't be mawkish over it, please! I want you to make me a promise, and keep it. . . . Well, yes!—I'll tell you what it is. It would hardly be fair to make you promise in the dark. Promise not to come to Biarritz!" Challis hesitated, but promised. Judith laughed. "I was right, you see," she said. "You would have asked about trains at Cook's to-morrow."

There they stood, in the half-dark! Was Calypso saying to herself: "Now, can I trust this man to break his promise?" Was Challis asking himself, did she mean him to keep it?

In the end she spoke first, with a sudden movement that implied an end to disguise. "Oh, dear, how silly one is! Why should we not speak plain? After all, we are alive, and grown up." Yet it seemed difficult, too, and came with an effort. "Listen to me, Scroop, and don't try to say things—because it does no good. You and I have to say good-bye, and mean it. We are best apart, for both our sakes. You as good as said but now that you would forget me if Marianne would help. That is what it came to; don't deny it!" Challis felt that his attempt to lay his soul bare had failed; that he was being misinterpreted. But he had a poor case; silence was safest. She continued: "It is not as if I were prepared to quarrel with my family for your sake. I certainly would not for anyone else's, if that is any satisfaction to you. But suppose I were, have you asked yourself what course would be open to us? . . . Oh yes!—I am talking like a lawyer; but a woman has to be practical when her life is at stake. . . . Well!—what could you do? Ignore your marriage, under the false warranty of a law we both disallow, and make a sort of Gretna Green business of it next spring? . . ."

"Why next spring? I don't see how the time comes in."

"Foolish man! You haven't thought the matter out. Just think of it *now*. Suppose that Bill were to pass next session—or next whatever it is—while we are arranging this escapade? . . . what would you do then, please?"

"I can't look at it in that—concrete way."

"Because it puts you in a fix." She had a half-hearted laugh for man's superior wisdom, with his eyes closed to all practical issues. Then her voice got a sudden tone. "Come, we must part, you and I! There is nothing else for it. It is all nonsense about your wife. She will come to her senses. She will have to, if the Bill passes."

"I should not try to compel her against her will."

"Are you sure? Might it not be your duty to the children? . . . Now, don't let's talk about it any more. It must come to good-bye in the end. . . ." Her words hung fire, but she kept her self-control admirably; no one could have called her excited, much less hysterical. Then she said, in a quick, subdued voice: "I shall always think of our good time—before all this—as one of the happiest times of my life. Now good-bye!"

Why could the man not shake hands and go, without more ado? Of course, that would have been the correct form—left his cards—sent his compliments to The Family—*bon voyage!*—all that sort of thing! Well!—perhaps the woman did not mean him to.

What happened was this—that is, this is all the story needs: that Judith repeated decisively, "Good-bye!" and Challis said never a word. But he had her hands in his, and it was some slight emphasis in his clasp, or some little turn a bystander would not have seen, from which she shrank back, saying: "No—or listen! Promise me again you will not come to Biarritz." To which he replied: "I promise." Then she said: "Very well, then—on those terms say good-bye how you like."

Then it was that Challis made matters ten times worse, ten times harder to deal with in that period of his life that followed. It is a curious thing that one good long kiss—a transaction that when in a frolic has absolutely no meaning whatever—should acquire from its concomitants a force to cling about the memory, and in a sense to warp the understanding, of its executant—the only word we can find at a short notice. It did, in this case, and possibly Calypso meant it should do so all along—administered her little dose of nectar with a full knowledge of its powers as an intoxicant. Indeed, if Miss Arkroyd had it in her heart through all this last interview to complete the winding of that skein she began a twelvemonth back, she could scarcely have handled the thread more cleverly.

It is not for this story to decide what the young lady had in her heart. For all it knows, she may have felt either triumphant, disgusted, or indifferent, when she saw the name of Mr. Alfred Challis

the author—"Titus Scroop" in a parenthesis—in the list of recent arrivals at Biarritz, and did not mention the fact to her hostess or any of her friends. But she met Mr. Challis on the esplanade next day, and introduced him to them equably as a friend of her father's. She must have forgiven him his broken promise, or ignored it.

CHAPTER XXXIX

OF THE NEWS MR. ELPHINSTONE TOLD MRS. PROTHEROE. HOW CHALLIS HAD FOLLOWED JUDITH TO MENTONE. YOUNG MRS. CRAIK AND HER DEAD DICKY-BIRD. HOW CHALLIS BECAME A KNIGHT

When Miss Arkroyd came back to her sister's wedding in January it was not to Grosvenor Square, but Royd Hall. A wedding in London in midwinter would have been too awful. Fancy being married in a thick fog! Thus it happened that Grosvenor Square remained packed in brown holland and carpetless until the Family came back from abroad in April. The middle of that month saw the wrappers off the picture-frames and the carpets on the stairs. The windows were cleaned, and the beds were made, and the fires were lighted. These last in every room, for snow and sleet were whirling about in the Square; and the full horror of an average Spring was cutting Londoners to the quick, after hopes had been held out of an abnormal one.

The housekeeper's room in the basement had as good a fire in it as the best; and the butler, who had been abroad with the Family, and had come back in advance to prepare the way for it, was taking a cup of tea there, and chatting over the occurrences during his absence with the lady in possession, Mrs. Protheroe, the housekeeper—a responsible person, to whom it was safe to speak about things, under reserve. One of the things was a thing to the importance of which we couldn't shut our eyes, if true. It threw all other subjects into the shade.

"That's the gentleman, Mrs. Protheroe. You mark my words if it isn't!" And Mr. Elphinstone repeated his words, that they might be better marked, more than once, in the silence that followed.

"I shall be very greatly shocked, Mr. Elphinstone, if it turns out like you think. But we must hope and pray no such a disgrace could happen to the Family."

The old lady, a perfect example of her kind, who had known the Family through two generations, was gravely disquieted provisionally. But such a thing was not to be accepted lightly, what-

ever it was. Dismiss it or condemn it, certainly! Entertain it, scarcely!

Mr. Elphinstone appeared to revolve something in his mind. It found expression in the words, "It was Michaelmas. Last Michaelmas twelve months. Just a year and a half."

"He and his wife dined once, and then he came down to Royd." In Mrs. Protheroe's speech all things relate to the Family, so there is no need to say whom Mr. and Mrs. Challis dined with.

"Too free and easy, to my thinking. Wife a stoopid sort. Spoken of so afterwards in the Family freely. 'Armless, I should have put it at, myself."

"Received, certainly!" Mrs. Protheroe shows that she anticipates comment on the stupid lady's social drawbacks. But Mr. Elphinstone covers the ground fully.

"No questions were asked," he says. "Subsequently it was elicited Deceased Wife's Sister. Information from Bishop Barham's lady at the Castle."

"But her ladyship had called when in London." The implication was that the Family's *ægis,* once extended, was not a thing that could be withdrawn without loss of prestige. Mr. Elphinstone can recall, with reflection, incidents bearing on this point.

"In my hearing," he says, "no one but the Family being present, strong opinions tending to liberality received sanction. His lordship the Bishop's lady being referred to as bigoted, Sir Murgatroyd especially exculpating. Parties happening to be other parties' Deceased Wife's Sisters said to be victims of equivocal state of Law. I should say, too—but this, Mrs. Protheroe, is merely opinion—that the voice of her Grace the Duchess had weight, being thrown in the scale on the side of Toleration." Mr. Elphinstone felt pleased with his figure of speech, although he knew it was not original. He was indebted for it to Mr. Ramsey Tomes, to whom he was an attentive listener.

"Her ladyship," said Mrs. Protheroe, "has been predisposed towards her Grace from a child. Addicted, you might almost say. Some do think her Grace's opinions too easy."

"In this case," said Mr. Elphinstone, who wished to pursue his sketch of the *status quo,* whatever it was, "nothin' applied. Owing, I should say, to the fundamental attitood of Mrs. Challis. Both young ladies, as well as her ladyship, having gone lengths—I assure you, Mrs. Protheroe, having gone great lengths."

The housekeeper was not inclined to admit that she knew less than the butler. "So I have understood," she said, and added nods about more things she knew, but held in reserve. But she

would not entirely exclude Mr. Elphinstone. "Miss Sibyl behaved sweet, I must say. But it was just no use at all, any more than a lump of lead."

The butler looked introspective and analytical.

"You have to consider, ma'am," said he, unconsciously borrowing a phrase from Dr. Johnson, "that class-feeling may run high when least expected. Can we blame a lady of her style for refusing to mix? Especially when compliance leads to ructions."

Mrs. Protheroe looked thoughtful, too. "Once to dinner," she said. "Once to an evening. Afterwards excuses. No—Mr. Elphinstone. I'll tell you just how I see it. No lady would ever feel so to undervalue herself—not to the extent of denying herself. Their looks satisfy, personally, and give confidence. But, sought for in Society on behalf of their husbands—no!"

This way of putting the case would bear polishing, no doubt! But when we have said that no woman with any *amour propre* at all would keep out of brilliant Society on her merits, but might do so rather than be the mere satellite of a distinguished husband, have we improved so very much on Mrs. Protheroe's inexactitudes?

Mr. Elphinstone would take a second cup of tea, thank you! He was determined to sift to the dregs this matter he couldn't shut his eyes to. "I should like, ma'am," said he, "to pursue the sequel with you, having spoken so frank. Allow me! It is impossible for me, although no names are mentioned, to keep going a pretence of ignorance." He dropped his voice. "There is great warmth of feeling in the Family; it cannot be disguised. The Family sometimes forget the presence of the household, and raise their voices. The household may conscientiously withdraw, but the principle continues to hold good that scraps leak out." Mr. Elphinstone seemed to feel a reluctance, creditable in so old a retainer, to confess to so much knowledge of the Family's private affairs, overheard against his will; and his apologies for this knowledge made him prolix. Abbreviated, his narrative told of fiery passages of arms between Judith and her mother and sister; more temperate, but still warm, discussion between the former and her father, and a certain amount of chance phrases from semi-confidential talk between her ladyship and the Duchess, and one or two others. But they all related manifestly to a determination of Judith to marry a gentleman the Family would have none of on any terms. And this not on the score of class-prejudice, nor of ways and means, nor of any personal aversion, but simply because the said gentleman was to all intents and purposes a married man. Having regard to some niceties of social intercourse, or their omis-

sion, as between Mr. Alfred Challis and Miss Arkroyd, their frequent correspondence and obvious *empressement* in each other's society, there could be no reasonable doubt who this gentleman was. Mr. Elphinstone's second cup must have been cold by the time he drank it, so absorbed was he in this narrative.

"I don't see all you do, Mr. Elphinstone, nor hear. Naturally, because of opportunities! But I *have* seen our Miss Judith and this Mr. Challis together. . . ."

The butler interrupted. "He's been honoured with knighthood, as I understand. Sir Alfred Challis. Doo to literary distinction!"

"Oh, indeed, I didn't know." Mrs. Protheroe was impressed. "Sir Alfred Challis. Well, I should have said, without ever being told, they was going on. And you said she called him Alfred, and said she would marry him?" This referred to the most striking passage of the butler's narrative. Repetition would reinforce it.

"It was exactly that," said he. "I was approachin' the door, and endeavoured to call attention. But Miss Judith, partly not noticing, partly in her 'igh mood, not caring, just went on: 'I should marry Titus if he were divorced,' she was just shouting it out in a tempest. 'I *should*,' she says. 'Why should I not marry him, when this woman is not his wife?' And then, 'If she is his wife, how dares she refuse to live with him?' And then, 'If she is his wife, how dares she deprive him of his children? Answer that!' It all came very quick. Then Miss Judith, she sees me—just come in—and says to me, a bit quieter: 'No, Elphinstone, don't you go. *I'm* going.' And sweeps out, white. I asked pardon, but the bell had rung twice. Her ladyship says, 'Never mind, Elphinstone!' Then she sinks back like on the sofa, and says to Miss Sibyl . . ."

The housekeeper interrupted. "We mustn't call her ladyship out of her name," she said deprecatingly.

"Old 'abit!" says Mr. Elphinstone. "Where was I? . . . Oh, says to Lady Felixthorpe, 'The girl frightens me.' And then, 'Oh dear!—fancy her making a scene here in the Hotel!' Then Miss Sib . . . her ladyship, Lady Felixthorpe, she says to me: 'Can't the people in the next room hear every word through that door, Elphinstone?' As if I knew everything, Mrs. Protheroe!"

"You reassured her ladyship, Mr. Elphinstone?"

"I mentioned that the party in the next room was fouring; and not unlikely unfamiliar with English. Also, if anyone was there they would be audible—all being alike in that respect on the Continent—but in point of fact the suite was vacant." His cup was,

too. When he had received another, and said "Thank you," he added: "But that was not the only occasion, by many, Miss Judith made use of the expression 'Titus.'"

From this it may be gathered that the Family, diminished by one of the daughters, had after her wedding fled to the Riviera, and remained until an enjoyable sunshine convinced them—they being English—that it was getting too hot, and also imposed on their credulity to the extent of making them believe Spring had begun in England. So, at this moment, they are *en route* for Grosvenor Square, somewhere, having sent Elphinstone on ahead, to get the house ready for their arrival. He and Mrs. Protheroe have, therefore, a splendid opportunity for comparing notes, and just before we found them doing so he had remarked that a gentleman whom Mrs. Protheroe would remember two years ago—"play-acting gentleman—friend of Miss Judith's—slight, middle-aged—soft felt hat—talked to himself—smoker—got him?" had turned up at Mentone just before he left, and had renewed his intercourse with the Family.

Thereupon Mrs. Protheroe, who had "got" Challis after some effort of memory, had said uneasily: "I hope that would not be the same gentleman. . . ." And Mr. Elphinstone had asked, "What gentleman?" On which Mrs. Protheroe pleaded, apologetically, guilty to gossip. Perhaps she ought not to have said it. But there, it was only the child, after all. Little Tilley! All nonsense, most likely! Being pressed, she had produced a letter from Cintilla, saying boldly that "Miss Judith's lover had reappeared, and they'd made it up; only her ladyship and Sir Murgatroyd refused to see him." The pretty little ex-dairy maiden, whom a course of spoiling had not improved, had withheld the name of Miss Judith's admirer. Mrs. Protheroe might guess. It was then that Mr. Elphinstone noted his desire that his words should be marked. No doubt Mrs. Protheroe marked them as little as you and I have done in response to like appeals.

However, this April chat, more than ten months after Challis wrote his letter to Judith, to get her to try to whitewash him in Marianne's eyes, will serve to show how the pieces have shifted on the board. For an untold gap in a tale is like the hour of the game of chess you, the spectator, were called away from to speak to Mrs. Smith. When you left, not a piece was lost, and Black had taken the opportunity to castle. When you returned, White and Black had exchanged queens, and heaps of pawns and pieces were smiling sickly smiles upon the floor, and had lost interest in the proceedings, as you had done yourself. Still, you pretended

that you could see exactly what had happened, which was fibs. But you recovered interest in the game then, and may do so in the story. However, the intervening *hiatus* cannot be left an absolute blank.

It was made up, for Challis, of more or less disguised dangling at the heels of Judith Arkroyd, broken by several short excursions, pleasant enough, abroad, and one short, dreary sojourn at his own empty home. This was chosen at the period of Bob's holidays, which were divided by that young man impartially between Wimbledon and Broadstairs. He showed an accommodating, unenquiring spirit in his acceptance of the *status quo*, as somehow or other right; offering to fight any disputant of his own sex and weight who suggested that his domestic arrangements were exceptional. He silenced controversy by trenchant expressions, such as "You shut up, anyhow!" and went so far once as to tell Tillotson —who had two Camberwell Beauties, certainly, but was in all other human relations an Awful Little Humbug—that Dean Tillotson, his father, and Lady Augusta Tillotson, his mother, only resided together to produce a false impression of concord on the cathedral-town society they were central pivot of. Once out of the public sight, according to Bob, this worthy prelate—of whom he knew absolutely nothing—and his aristocratic wife "went on" like a cat and dog. Morally, of course! Bob admitted, under catechism, that her ladyship was not driven up trees and afraid to come down because the Dean was barking at the bottom; but, metaphorically speaking, he held to his indictment—provisionally, at least, until it should be shown in a fair ordeal of battle that the owner of the Camberwell Beauties could lick its promulgator. Challis ventured to dwell on the unfairness of making the preservation of an unblemished family reputation turn on such an issue, but Bob was deaf to argument. Europe would see, next term, if he didn't give Tillotson an awful licking, and thereby prove his words true. He would have done so last term, only that old fool Spit had caught the combatants *in flagrante delicto*, and made them write alternate verses of the sixth book of the "Iliad" all through, off the same copy.

Bob's reports of the household at Broadstairs were Challis's only information about Marianne and the little girls, and it appeared from these that his mother had been loyal to her husband in one respect; she had kept back the reasons of their separation from the children. Circumstances had been glossed over—veils drawn. Young folk can be easily duped by guardians and parents, who do not generally scruple—did yours?—to take advantage of their

simplicity. As long as his father and mother were satisfied, Bob was content. And as long as his sisters felt in some sort of touch with "at home," through his own holiday visits "at grandmamma's," their inquiries took no very active form. Challis could not ask his boy the questions he longed to ask. How was it possible, for instance, to say to him, "Do Chobbles and Mumps never ask after their Pappy?" He was constantly in dread of saying something that would set the boy's curiosity on the alert. And he was thankful, when the time for school came again, that it was still, so far as he knew, at rest.

But the joy of oblivion, in change of scene and association, grew on him. He left England for the South of France, as we have seen, shortly after Bob departed for Broadstairs the first time, midway in his summer holiday. He wandered about a little in old French towns after Judith returned for her sister's wedding, catching the last half of Bob's Christmas holiday, that youth having spent the first half partly at his grandmamma's and partly in a visit to a school-friend. If you know and understand boys, you will feel no surprise on hearing that this was Tillotson! Bob had a high old time at the Deanery at Inchester to tell his father of when he went to the Hermitage in January. And his spontaneous narratives of the distinguishing features of Inchester and Broadstairs, to the disadvantage of the latter, did more to bring an image of Marianne and her present surroundings to her husband's mind than more carefully prepared statements, substantially true, could have done. Grandmamma was not a stinking old Salvation Army Dissenter, but a properly enrolled member of the Establishment. Nevertheless, Bob's contrast between what he called "her style" and that of the Venerable Dean was full of suggestion to his father, whose imagination could supply the merely academical accuracy needed for a perfect picture.

When Bob went back to school Challis remained at the Hermitage long enough to complete the correction of the proofs of his forthcoming novel for the Spring issue. "The Hangman's Orphan" had been already announced in the press, and only a revise or two was wanting to complete it. He arranged that this should be posted to him at Mentone, where he expected to remain through January. He could wire corrections if needful.

Whether his selection of Mentone for a winter sojourn was the result of a suggestion from Judith or not is of little importance to the story. What does concern it is the question how Challis came to be admitted on the family visiting-list at all when he left

his card at the Hôtel de la Paix on their arrival. Remember what Sibyl's report may have—must have—been of the little drama she had distinguished in "Tophet" in the moonlight of last June. Certainly Challis had "left cards" in Grosvenor Square once or twice; had, at Judith's suggestion, been engaged elsewhere when once asked to dinner, but had had no real intercourse with any of the Family, except that time when he was caught and brought into the house by Cintilla. Of course, if Judith's hand had been free, things would have been different. Still, something is needed to account for the position of affairs at Mentone. There was certainly a change.

Our own belief is that the brilliant success of a play of our author's at the Megatherium Theatre had a great deal to do with it.

Nice scruples bow before great booms; and although Sibyl's antipathy, shared to a great extent by her mother, and her father's irresolution before their united forces, were obstacles to Miss Arkroyd's perfect freedom of intercourse with that Mr. Challis who had married his Deceased Wife's Sister, and was living apart from her, they were obstacles of a sort liable to disappear under a sufficiently lofty heap of laurels. Even her Grace of Rankshire, who had condemned Challis off-hand, and recommended that the doors of Royd Hall should be closed against him, softened in the Royal box before the thunders of applause that accompanied the call for the author when the curtain fell on "Aminta Torrington." He wasn't Shakespeare, of course; but, then, he wasn't Ibsen, and *what* a comfort that was! And one couldn't stand against a popular verdict. "And, after all," said she to Lady Arkroyd, "we probably only know half the story."

"Well, Thyringia," said Lady Arkroyd, thereon, "you know it isn't me that is making the fuss," which was not only bad grammar, but untrue. "If you would say a word to Sir Murgatroyd to influence him, it would have such weight. And then the man could come to a reception or something, and Ju would let me have a little peace. I can't tell you how sick and tired I am of it all."

Whereupon her Grace had attacked the Bart. before the Bishop, to the discomfiture of both; the Bart. because he was really unconscious of any active share in the ostracism of Challis, and only supposed that he was meeting her ladyship half-way; the Bishop because Thyringia seized the opportunity of flouting his lordship on the Deceased Wife's Sister question—trampling on his most cherished episcopal conviction as nothing but a coronet would have dared to do. She chose to ascribe the attitude of Royd towards

Challis entirely to his irregular marriage, and "pointed out" that if the legalizing Bill passed next year—"and it would, yes!"—the Bart. would look like a fool. "What a parcel of geese you are," said her Grace before a whole roomful of people, "to suppose the man wants to marry Judith! . . . Well! he'll have to look sharp about it, anyhow!" The Bishop turned purple; but there!—a Duchess can say exactly whatever she likes.

No doubt the confidence her Grace expressed that the "legalizing Bill" would pass—backed as her opinion was by that of many others—had its fair share of weight. For both Judith's parents, with a probably well-grounded faith that their daughter, if only from self-interest, would do nothing irregular, could not hide from themselves that they would welcome any change that would define the position, and keep the suspected couple permanently apart.

This feeling may well have increased and taken a more heartfelt form when Challis, possibly with the written sanction of Judith—but nothing came out to that effect—made his appearance at Mentone. Lady Felixthorpe and her husband joined the party later. It must have been during their short stay that the little scene occurred so graphically described by the butler to Mrs. Protheroe. This little scene, the news of which reached England a few days before its actors, prepares the story for a change in its conditions. It has to adapt itself to a new state of things—a state three words of Mr. Elphinstone's narrative suffice to show. Judith is speaking of Challis as Titus.

Had the lonely and reserved young widow with the two little girls, who lived with her mother at Broadstairs, and was called by the few who had occasion to call her anything "Young Mrs. Craik"—had she been told that that other woman, whom she hated as a Choctaw hates a Cherokee—to scalping-point—was actually speaking and thinking of the husband she had renounced by the name the pride of her heart in his first great success in authorship had chosen and kept for him and, although less frequent in speech than of old, it was the name her own mind still gave him—would it have added anything to her resentment? Would she have been one scrap more miserable than she was, for knowing it? The story has to report otherwise.

As a matter of fact, Marianne would in a sense have welcomed the knowledge. She had made up her mind to kill her love for the father of her children, and it may be she found it died harder than she expected. Did you, who read this, ever have to kill any-

thing larger than an insect you could flatten out in a trice to a mere blot? You may perhaps have caught some bird, maimed by a sportsman—or sportsbooby—past all hope of rising in the wind—just a scrabbled wreck, good for nothing but for a sportscat to get a little joy from—and may have seen that it would be merciful in you, not a sportsperson at all, but a sentimentalist, to make a quick end of it; and then you may have tried, and found it still had heart in it for a fight for life. Did your sentimentalism make you feel sick, till the last last kick left it collapsed and cooling? Then, were you not glad?

Marianne would have been glad to know that her love for Titus was dead, and the killing of it come to an end. But would it die? There was always the painful doubt. Your little dicky-bird ended on a tiny jerk, and hung limp and chill. Would a love those two young folks brought back memories of, hour by hour, do the like?

More than once, Choctaw as she was, her mind had wavered towards relenting. Once she had actually begun a letter to her husband—not imploring forgiveness for her overstrained anger and jealousy; she was too proud for that sort of thing—but the other sort of thing, the sort that is ready with Christian Forgiveness, the sort that makes the consumption of a good large humble pie a *sine qua non*, the sort that indulges in a truculent sort of joy over the sinner that repenteth. She was too proud to admit that she had been at all in fault, but just—only just—*not* too proud to indulge a secret hope that Titus would be magnanimous enough to shut his eyes to her omission. All she wanted was contrition galore and absolution absolute. On those terms she would come back and marshal Mrs. Steptoe and the crew of a new domestic Argo. Only, bygones were to be bygones! She had a dim sense that this expression was to be held to mean that Charlotte Eldridge was to be assoilzied. It was a dim one, because she had no idea of admitting that she had been influenced by Charlotte.

Her mother dissuaded her from sending this letter, if you call it dissuasion to "point out" that Hell-fire awaits those who run counter to your voice of warning. What Challis would have called the "religious hoots" of the worthy old lady took the form of warning her daughter against returning to what Holy Writ denounced plainly as a Life of Sin. She omitted to mention the chapter and verse; but, then, her style, as Bob called it, was one that lent itself to fervour—not to say bluster—rather than verification of references. It was a style that Bob, backed by his father—and Tillotson's, for that matter—could easily sneer at. But it was harder for Marianne to ignore the force of the words-without-

meaning that had been thundered at her from her cradle. The well-worn phrases had force in them still for her, and when she burned that letter she had a kind of sacred feeling, like the Northern Farmer when he came away from Church.

It is right to mention, lest any reader should condemn Marianne for too great submission to her mother, that the thunderbolts of hereditary superstition were not the only malign influences she had to bear up against. She never lost touch with Charlotte Eldridge. In fact, Charlotte paid her more than one short visit at Broadstairs, and made the best use of her time in each. Nothing could have exceeded the earnestness of her supplications to her friend to allow her to act as intercessor and mediator, to be the bearer of the olive-branch of peace, except it were the warmth of her exhortations to forgiveness, or the subtle dexterity with which the suggestion of offence still untold weakened the effect of both. It is impossible to enlarge on the merit of overlooking the wrong that has been inflicted on us, without by implication enlarging the area of the wrong itself. Meekness needs something to work with, a buffalo cannot find sustenance from a flower-pot. Charlotte never asked pardon for the offender without contriving to suggest a new offence.

Of course, if Marianne had not been a bit of a Choctaw, the position need never have become so exasperated. But it isn't fair to make her the scapegoat on that account. What a many items of the total imbroglio could have cancelled it, by simply attending to their own non-existence! If, for instance, Judith Arkroyd had kept her eyes to herself, or had never left Challis's hand to do the letting-go—who can say, then, what the exact force of that moonlight adventure in Tophet would have been? Or if that theatrical nonsense had not let witchcraft loose on an easy victim; easy because unsuspicious? Or if Marianne's writing-paper had been the thin sort that goes abroad, eight pages for twopence-halfpenny, instead of that sort the envelope cuts your tongue when you lick it to —Harmood's phraseology, we believe—would not Challis have read the postscript? Think of the difference that would have made!

No!—there is no sense in trying to fix blame; certainly not on either of the principal actors. Blame Judith if you like! But even then, bear in mind that until Challis broke out in that foolish way, Judith had observed all the rules of the game, and was playing fair. Do her justice! Can you gibbet Judith, without affirming that a woman has no right to be beautiful, and very little to take for granted that a man with a still young wife and two children will not credit her with a readiness to assume as a

matter of course that he will never imagine that she will suppose he has fallen in love with her? . . . We hope this is intelligible. More might be added to the same effect, but let it stand.

Judith's father never saw any fault to be found with his daughter's conduct; so why should the story? However, it is true that Sibyl always said that papa was a bat; and her ladyship suggested that, socially speaking, conflagrations might break out all round, and Sir Murgatroyd never notice them until she called his attention to them. When the Duchess said what the story has already reported about Challis and Judith, it only presented itself to him as a sheer joke; his Arcadian mind could not receive the idea of Judith—our Judith!—nourishing a *tendresse* for . . . a married author! It was not the authorship, but the marriage, or marriages rather; for if we considered Marianne null and void, what should we call her residuum? A widower at large, with a doubtful record?

The fact is, the old boy had a fine chivalrous heart behind his occasional absurdities, and any advantage taken of a legal technicality to shuffle out of a deliberate contract would have been branded by him as it deserved. And, although it was quite untrue that he was the maker of the fuss her ladyship disclaimed any hand in, it is certain that he inaugurated a fuss of his own invention after that outbreak of the Duchess, when he heard—to deglutition point—the full story of Marianne's revolt. It had been placed before him some time since in an imperfect form, but he had swallowed barely a mouthful. Now that his wife satisfied the curiosity her Grace's escapade had excited, and gave him full details, he became keen to justify Mrs. Challis, and was for a while secretly intolerant of her husband. He *would* know all about it; and in spite of his informant's appeal to him to be most careful on no account to say anything to Judith, he seized an early opportunity to get at that young lady's version of the subject.

"Oh dear!—that tiresome woman!" was her spoken response. But the kiss she bestowed on her parent's shaving-area was commiserating, tolerant of the inquiry, not absolutely unamused at the Arcadian simplicity of the kisss. Dear old man, leaving his manures and eleventh centuries and things, to meddle with Us and the World! A kiss that said, "What a shame of mamma to disturb such pastoral tranquillity!" But Judith would keep nothing back, not she! She dropped into the visitor's chair of the Bart.'s sanctum, to tell the tale, throwing her hands in her lap, to lie there till wanted; a sort of despairing submission to lip-boredom to come. "I need not drum through the whole story; it's too

silly!" She looked appealingly at her father, who immediately weakened his position of catechist.

"Oh no!—your mother has told me the main facts," said he. And then, perhaps feeling ground lost, added: "At least, I infer so."

"Did she tell you *I* was supposed to be the heroine of the romance?" Eyes closed for a second on an amused face, reopened to look for the answer. Self-possession perfect!

"Well—yes! She said something of the sort."

"Did she say I was in love with Challis?"

"Certainly not!" Emphatically.

"Well, I don't know! One can't trust one's *madre*. I shouldn't have been the least surprised."

"Oh—hum—well! Very distinguished man. . . ."

"Oh, I like Challis very much. He's a most amusing companion. I wish that fool of a woman wouldn't make him so miserable."

"I understand she took offence at his showing you. . . ."

"Showing me her letter! Yes—just fancy! Why—the letter was as good as a letter to *me*. It was nothing but a message to say why she wouldn't come to Royd. . . . No, really there was nothing else in it. . . . Well!—something illegible on the back that he had overlooked. And she would listen to no explanation, and went off in a fury, and took the children with her. And he's never seen her since."

"I can't believe she has any claim to the children. Has he taken legal advice?"

"Oh dear, yes! Heaps. But it seems he can do nothing. She was a half-sister of his first wife, you know. If he had married her in Australia, he might, they said, have got some legal remedy in Australia; but even then they thought he would have had a deal of trouble to get at the children. I think he has done wisely to let it alone. Frank says the Bill is sure to pass the Lords this year or next; probably this. Then she'll *have* to be his wife, whether she likes it or not. I've no patience with such folly."

The Baronet assumed the look of intense profundity political males generally wear in the presence of womankind, suggesting magazines of thought beyond their shallow comprehension. "Some —very—funny—questions," he said, in judicial instalments, "will arise if that Bill becomes Law. Ve-ry funny ones." But apparently too complex or too delicate for discussion with one's daughters. So the Bart. shut them into his soul with the closed lips of discretion, and looked responsible.

Perhaps Judith saw her way to quenching any suspicions anent herself and Challis by parading her unreluctance to talk about him. "I don't know," said she, "that a little trouble is necessarily bad for Challis, with all this success going on. It may save him from becoming odious. Besides, of course, Marianne means to come back to him in the end."

This was about the time of Sibyl's wedding, shortly after the production of "Aminta Torrington." So convincing was Judith's attitude of her detachment from Challis, helped always by his leaving England immediately afterwards, that all suspicion had vanished from the mind of her parents by the time he made his appearance at Mentone; and at that time Sibyl was honeymooning: There had never been anything that could be called a split. And discretion, for some reason, must have been carefully observed by Challis and Judith during this visit, for gossip never mentioned them in the same breath. And the lady's father, in our opinion, was righteously shocked when it came to his knowledge that his daughter and this gentleman, who had been accepting his hospitality as a married man, were to all intents and purposes plighted lovers, and free to wed without let or hindrance. Except, indeed, on the lady's side, an almost solid phalanx of family opposition, and on the gentleman's a previous marriage which was no legal wedlock at all, but which he could not be said to have been disloyal to, for he had never either refused to play the husband nor been guilty of any legal infidelity. It was entirely Marianne who had refused to play the wife.

Lord Felixthorpe, Sibyl's coronet, was the only dissentient in the family circle. "It certainly seems to me," said he, as deliberately as ever, "that either our Legal Acumen, or our Boasted Civilization, or our Moral Sense, or the Marvellous Elasticity of our Political System, or Convocation, or the Higher Socialism, or something equally impressive, must be in a sense defective, when any person not convicted of crime is under compulsion to live single, as long as there is a lady willing to marry him. I say nothing of the case of a friend of ours (whom I do not name for obvious reasons) who says that no lady will accept him. If he were to endeavour to drag an unwilling bride to the altar, the police should be instructed to interpose. But in the case of Challis—if I am rightly informed—my fascinating sister-in-law is ready to accept the situation. Now, although, under the existing Law, one's own Deceased Wife's Sister is excluded from the questionable advantage of becoming one's Legitimate Wife, the most

stringent morality has never enrolled someone else's Live Wife's Sister among prohibited degrees of consanguinity. . . ."

"Do say what you mean, Frank, instead of going out of your way to make fun of Will, and talking nonsense!"

"I mean, dearest, that it's too much to expect of any fellow that he's to stand his wife bolting on the plea that the wedding-knot wasn't tied, and lugging away his kids, and refusing to see him, and him not be allowed to marry somebody else."

But William Rufus, who had been slighted by an American beauty, and was gloomy in consequence, shook his head and said. "Can't see it—never shall!" And Sibyl settled the matter. "If he wants to marry anybody else's husband's Live Wife's Sister, let him! Only not mine!"

So it had come about that discord reigned in Grosvenor Square when the Family returned from Mentone. But the outer world knew nothing about it. Mr. Elphinstone and Mrs. Protheroe talked of what they heard to each other, and nothing reached the lower stratum of the household. Conjecture must supply a motive for delay on the part of this betrothed couple: for they must be called so. If they intended to ignore Marianne and defy public opinion, why not do so at once? Was it because no certainty existed that Challis's marriage was invalid? No legal means of dissolving a marriage not recognized by Law seems to exist. It was impossible to make a clean slate and start fair. Who could say that time would be sufficient to calm the family tempest and put the ship in commission so as to be sure of sailing before that Bill was brought forward in the Commons? Suppose it was rushed through, and overtook the wedding! Was Judith's thirst for wedlock intense enough to run such a risk? Was it not, rather, common prudence to wait for the rejection of the Bill, and have a cool year to turn the matter over? Our own impression is that the young lady was not in love enough to say *yes* to the first question, or *no* to the second.

Whether Challis's arrangement of his affairs and his whereabouts—always favouring what Harmood would have called "keeping company," while thrusting himself as little as possible on the Family—was in consequence of a definite plan of campaign, arranged with Judith, is not known to this story. There is a suspicion that the attack of influenza that laid him up at Marseilles on November 6 was made the most of, in order that he might shirk the receipt of knighthood in person on the 9th. There is his name among the Birthday Honours of the year; and, as we all know, he is now Sir Alfred Challis. He was able, somehow, to

get enough degrees of fever certified to make his presence at the Palace impossible; but whether he knelt to receive them subsequently, or whether they reached him through the æther, like a Marconigraph, we do not know. He had certainly shaken off the "flu" very completely when he came to England after Christmas.

The story is a bit hazy on many points at this period. What made Challis, with all his impatience with what he called the "performing classes," accept a knighthood? One theory—a plausible one—is that Judith ordered him to do so. Not from any idea that her parents or Sibyl would soften towards Challis on that account—much they cared for knighthoods! But she was woman enough to wish to have the World on her side. It might be a snobbish world; but what a big one it is! And what a lot of power one's elbow gets from the sympathy of it! Anyhow, to our thought, Challis, having accepted the honour at Judith's bidding, ought to have overcome his reluctance to conform to usages, and not run his temperature up to 103. As it was, the little thermometer had its way.

He remained abroad, then, until the Easter holiday—which coincided, you see, very nearly with the return of the Family to Grosvenor Square—when he came to Wimbledon for some more Bob. All we want to know about him at this time, and for a little time yet, is that his correspondence with Judith continued, and that during the season in London the two of them contrived to meet very frequently. It was a wonder they managed to steer clear of gossip as cleverly as they did.

But an anxious time was approaching. Suppose that Bill passed! . . .

Did Challis ever say to himself, to put a finishing-touch on the oddity of his position, "What would it matter? If it did put a barrier between me and Judith, would it not give me back my old home and the kids?" The story can conceive his doing so, and also that his mind would then wander back on his old days . . . not always perfect; but still! . . . and then would shudder at its own brutality, for never asking what of Judith, in that case? What would be left for *her?* For Challis, though he had speculated a good deal in his writings on the many ways of loving that there are, had scarcely applied his conclusions to himself. Some theorists will have it that no man ever has the slightest consideration for the woman he loves—in one of the ways, mind you! —suppose we say the volcanic way! They hold that it is himself he loves all the time.

However, the Bishop said it was impossible that Bill should pass. And he ought to have known.

CHAPTER XL

HOW MISS FOSSETT WENT TO ROYD. ON SUSPENSION OF OPINION. ANXIETY ABOUT LIZARANN. A VISIT TO JIM, AND A RETROSPECT. HOW MISS FOSSETT MADE A NICE MESS OF IT

A HOT July was drawing to a close, and Athelstan Taylor and his friend Gus's sister Adeline Fossett were out early in the Rectory garden, and had many things to talk about. It was the Saturday morning of a Friday to Monday visit, which could not be prolonged, on any terms, till Tuesday.

One of the things they had to talk about was sad, as anyone could have told from their voices, without hearing a word distinctly. Because they were speaking with such very resolute cheerfulness of it; putting such a good face on it; each of them evidently thinking the other wanted an ally.

"I go by Sidrophel." It was Athelstan who said this. "Taking a man out of London to live on the south shore of the Mediterranean is like giving meat and drink after a diet of poisons. You'll see Gus's first letters will say he's well. He won't be, of course; one mustn't expect miracles. But it will seem like that—to him."

"I think that's very likely. But when I said I wished I had been able to go with him, I didn't mean that. I don't believe he'll want any coddling or looking after out there. What I was thinking of was the poor boy being so lonely, all by himself." But Athelstan laughed out at this: the idea of a pastor of a flock being *lonely!*—the last thing in the world! The lady admitted this, and helped it a little. "Yes—and, after all, it isn't as if we had seen each other every day when he *was* in London." Then she reflected a little, and added: "Besides, I couldn't have gone, anyhow, because of mother." Of whom this story can report nothing, no questions having been asked. "Mother" must have her place in it as the reason Miss Fossett could not go to Tunis.

Something came to the Rector's mind which provoked a cheerful laugh. "I suppose," he said, "poor Challis would say we were bringing an indictment against the Almighty."

"I wonder you call him 'poor Challis,' Yorick. I've no pa-

tience! I've heard all about it from the other side, you know. But what did you mean he says?" The question is asked stiffly. Challis is evidently not in favour.

"He says that resignation, as practised, always seems to be meant as an indictment against the Almighty. It's true he said he was referring to venomous resignation. We must hope ours is t'other sort."

"I won't laugh at anything Mr. Challis says, Yorick. I've no patience with a man who behaves so to his wife. My cousin Lotty knew the whole thing from the beginning, and it's quite impossible she should be mistaken. . . . Oh yes!—I know what you're going to say. That little bit of Latin . . ."

"Well!—it's a very good little bit, as far as it goes. *Audi alteram partem!* Nobody ever bursts from bottling up his judgment until he has heard both sides."

"My dear Yorick, I agree with you *absolutely* about the principle as a general rule. But in this particular case I do think you are unreasonable. How is it possible Lotty should be mistaken, when Mrs. Challis is actually living at her mother's at Tulse Hill? Oh no! I do think you're quite wrong!"

"But I'm only refusing to form an opinion. I'm not expressing one."

"Well, if you don't see that Mr. Challis *must* be in the wrong, you never will see it. Don't be ridiculous and paradoxical, Yorick dear, because you know perfectly well you agree. Now don't you?"

"Can't say I do." And the conversation ran for some distance on the same pair of wheels, the lady always maintaining that in this one particular case suspension of opinion, pending production of evidence, is the merest affectation, and the gentleman resolutely refusing to make any exceptions. However, Miss Fossett had not produced all her arguments.

"Besides, Yorick dear, you know Mr. Challis *did* tell you all his side of the story." A head-shake. "No?—well, he had the opportunity of telling you, and he didn't, which is the same thing."

"No—no, Addie, not the same thing—not the same thing! You know I had a long talk twice with him about it. I went to see him on purpose, and neither time would he say a single word in self-defence . . ."

"Because he couldn't!"

"Oh no—no! Indeed, you're unfair to him. When I say *audi alteram partem*, in this case, I really mean wait till we are certain we have heard all there is to be said on the other side. I am as

sure as that I am standing here that the poor chap was tongue-tied by chivalry to his wife. I wish she would have seen me when I went . . ."

"You did go?"

"Oh yes—I went at once after seeing him, and only succeeded in seeing her mother, a horrid, religious old woman . . ."

"Yorick dear!"

"Well—you know what I mean. The old woman as good as told me I was a disgrace to my cloth, because I spoke of marriage with a deceased wife's sister as an open question. You know that question comes into Challis's affair—comes very much in . . ."

"I know. I know all about it. Only it's not the chief part . . . a . . . but you know, of course?"

"Yes—yes!—what it *was*—of course!" And then each nods and looks intuitive. If Charlotte Eldridge had been watching them then through a telescope, she would have been able to spot the exact moment at which a lady and gentleman—an unsanctioned brace, that is—came on the *tapis*.

How far can they be legitimately discussed—by us who know the lady? That's the point! Miss Fossett bites a thoughtful lip about it. Mr. Taylor utters a succession of short "hm's" and one long one; then says in a by-the-way manner that accepts a slight head-shake as an answer: "Didn't Judith Arkroyd speak to you? . . . Oh, I fancied she did;" adding, in a reserved tone of voice: "You know, I dare say, that she herself wrote to Mrs. Challis." And this speech seems to have the singular effect of removing a padlock from Adeline Fossett's tongue.

"Handsome Judith?" she says, oddly lighting on Marianne's term for her *bête noire*. "Oh, *I* know!—I quite understand."

"But *what* do you understand? Come, Addie dear, don't be . . . don't be *female* about it. Do say what!"

The impression or suggestion that she might have married which we fancy this story referred to when she first came into it seemed to mellow and mature in Miss Fossett as she replied, "Oh, Yorick, dear old boy! What an Arcadian shepherd you are!" And then she laughed, and repeated, "Handsome Judith!"

"But she showed me the letter—she showed me the letter!" cries the Rector, in a kind of frenzy with his friend for her persistence in being female, as he calls it. "Come, Addie, what could she do more?"

The above-named suggestion seems to mature until it all but insinuates that Adeline might marry still, if she chose. The thought just reaches the Rector's mind, and leaves it as she re-

peats, in answer to his question, "What more, indeed? But what did she say, I should like to know?"

"Ah!—that's the point. And we think we're going to be told, do we?" The Rector laughed a big good-humoured laugh. He detects in himself, and is puzzled by it, a new-born disposition to treat Addie as if she were in her teens, entirely caused by her excursion into feminine paths hard to explain or classify.

But she unexpectedly forms square to repulse patronage; harks back, as it were, to her thirties or forties—scarcely the latter yet—and says gravely, "No, dear old boy! I won't try to pry into any confidence. Don't tell me anything."

"I would as soon tell you as anyone"—he is looking at his watch—"a . . . yes . . . sooner than anyone—now Gus is gone." If the last four words had not been spoken, a hearer—Mrs. Eldridge, say—might have built an interest on what had preceded them. Those four made the speech fraternal.

Miss Fossett had come to Royd Rectory to pay a visit of consolation, following close on her brother's recent departure for Tunis. But it was also a visit to Lizarann. Her affection for the child was manifest from the fact that, when she arrived last night, before ever she ate a scrap of anything, after all that long journey, she went to look at her where she was asleep. It was nurse who made this mental note, and who remarked also, when Miss Fossett left the child's bedside, that she looked that upset you quite noticed it. Also that when the visitor said, "Is she always like that?" she seemed asking to enquire, like.

"And what did you say, Ellen?" said Miss Caldecott, in nurse's confidence. "I hope you didn't frighten Miss Fossett."

"Oh no, miss! I was careful not. I said the doctor took a most favourable view, and had all along. I told what he said about perspirations, and not to take too much account of temperatures, and improving symptoms. Oh no, I wasn't likely!" And Ellen is a little wounded at the bare suggestion that she should have any such a thing—her own phrase in speech with another confidante next morning.

And yet Miss Fossett *was* frightened! And when the Rector's voice intercepted the above colloquy from below, saying, "Bessy, come down and tell Addie what Dr. Pordage said about Lizarann," it was because Miss Fossett had gone to her very late refection quite white, and had said, referring to her visit upstairs, "Why, my dear Yorick, the little thing's in a perfect bath of perspiration!" And then she only had a little soup, and Cook took away

the things, because Rachael had gone to bed with a toothache.

However, next day in the sunshine, walking through the fields with the children to pay a visit to Lizarann's Daddy at Mrs. Fox's, she felt encouraged when she saw the little person running about in the highest spirits, gathering blackberries, with a beautiful faith that her Daddy would appreciate them.

"That wasn't a coft at all, Teacher," said Lizarann, when taxed with coughing. "I didited it myself."

"Then *that* was!"

"Only because I very nearly stumbled down," said Lizarann. She had a high colour in her cheeks, and her eyes looked very large, and her face wasn't thin—only her fingers. But her spirits were all that could be desired; so Miss Fossett had to be content with hoping all would go well, if she was stuffed with preparations of malt, and syrup of hypophosphites, and so on. But how about the winter? Was there no possible Tunis? For Miss Fossett's affection for the small waif went any lengths in projected antidotes to phthisis. If it was money that was the difficulty—well!—Yorick would have to get it from Sir Murgatroyd; none of his conscientious nonsense!

However, it might be all unnecessary. Just look at the child tearing down the hill with Phœbe, to get to her Daddy three minutes sooner, and shouting out "Pi-lot!" in defiance of orders. And such an *accolade* as she gave her father did not look, at this distance, at least, like either extract of malt or hypophosphites.

Miss Fossett intended to make use of this visit to Jim to get from him, if she could, some information about the medical record of Lizarann's family. She had the old-fashioned faith that consumption is hereditary. It would be very nice to hear that it had never shown itself among her little *protégée's* ancestors. She had herself seen very little—almost nothing—of the blind man, and was curious to make his acquaintance, after hearing so much of him from the Rector.

Jim was not in the summer-house, but in Mrs. Fox's kitchen that opens on the garden. It is lucky none of the party is six-foot-six. But there is plenty of room, laterally.

Jim has to remind Lizarann of her social duties. "Ye'll have to name the good lady for me to know, little lass." And Lizarann shouts out "Teacher!" vehemently.

"Miss Fossett, at the school, you know, Mr. Coupland," says the owner of the name. "Lizarann's one of my best pupils, and she's going to get quite strong." There was an error in tact here; she should have recollected that Jim would be a stranger to the

medical discussions over his child's lungs. A slight misgiving crossed her mind.

"Quite strong—the lassie? Aye, to be sure!" says Jim in a puzzled sort of way. But the lassie herself supersedes the point, doing violence to the conversation. "So's Daddy's leg," she says, wrenching in a topic of greater importance. "Daddy's going to walk on it, quite strong, more than free miles, and no scrutches. Yass!"

Certainly no conversation such as Miss Fossett wished for would be possible as long as the children were here. Consultation with Mrs. Fox developed a scheme for their temporary suppression.

Suppose the two young ladies and Lizarann—the distinction is always nicely marked—were to go with her just three minutes' walk up at the back of the house to see the swarm of bees in Clyst's orchard. The supposition is entertained, and they go.

Miss Fossett admits to Jim that she has covertly sanctioned and encouraged this move, that tranquillity should ensue. But she nearly repented, she says, when she heard of the bees, lest they should sting. She hopes it's all right? Oh yes, Lard bless her, that's all right enough! Jim will go bail for the bees. Look, he says, at the many a chance they've had to get a turn at him in his summer-house—he seems to have appropriated it—and never gave him a thought! Besides, Jarge would be there, and he'd say a word to the bees and tell them.

"Ye see, mistress," Jim continued, "it's a trade with Jarge. He's a bee-master—so they call him—or you might say a bee-doctor; the folk round about send for him, miles."

"I want to talk about Lizarann directly," said Miss Fossett. "But tell me about George and the bees."

"Ah, Lizarann! . . . But I can tell about the bees, and soon done with. It was martal queer about George, when he was a youngster. The bees nigh stung him to death, for pinching of 'em inside the deep flowers when he got a chance. They were making a mistake, though; for it wasn't he did it, but another young shaver of his inches. So they cast about for to make him some amends."

"You don't mean they found out their mistake?"

"Ah, but I do! They're a sly race, and full of knowledge. How they did it between them I can't say, but there it is!—they've come to the understanding. And what's the queerer is that George himself don't above half-understand what's said to him by a Christian. It's only bees he can tackle! . . . What was you kindly going to say about Lizarann?"

Miss Fossett, rendered cautious by the lapse she had so nearly made, saw no way of approaching the subject she was curious about. So she chatted on about Lizarann, hoping it might come into their talk accidentally. Jim was eloquent about his gratitude for all that had been done for himself and his child. "But for you and the master," said he, "I'd have been selling matches in the streets still. That was before my accident. But you won't say anything of that to my lassie." His hearer understood him. No—she would say nothing of his begging days to Lizarann. He thanked her again. "But," he added, "I wish you and the Rector-gentleman could have seen me eight year agone—no!—barely seven year. I might have been grateful to some kind of purpose then. I'm little use now!" Pride without a trace of vanity was in his voice as he added. "There was a fine man in my place in those days, and you'd ha' said so, lady." The waste remnant was speaking of its former self.

Adeline Fossett succeeded in none of the things she tried to say. It did not matter. He would be sure to talk of the past, and she would glean all she wanted. He took for granted, as part of the conversation in the interim, the fact of his wife's death.

"That was it, ye see: her mother died. She would have been the eldest."

"I understand. The little one herself told me of your accident, and how you came back . . ."

"Aha!—my little lass! In coorse she would tell it! And she told about the Flying Dutchman, I'll go bail." Jim laughed joyously at the image his mind formed of Lizarann telling her inherited legend dramatically. As to the incredulity, he knew it would exist in some minds; so let it pass! "I came back, lady," he continued, "and I found Lizarann. But I was all in the dark, and no sight of my wife's face. And there was no hiding it from her about my eyes—no chance! I never ought to have gone a-nigh the house. But she might have died, too . . ."

"You mean she would not have recovered, perhaps, if you *had* stopped away."

"Ah—if I had, ever so! But I was mazed with the longing to hear my girl's voice again, and maybe I never gave her the thought I should have done. I was a bad young man in those days, and suited myself when I might have done others a turn, many's the time. It's over and done with now." And his old self had vanished with it; so completely that the voice of its derelict, now speaking, had no consciousness in it of the way his narrative affected his hearers, as he continued, replying to a word of inquiry

from her: "My accident—ye'll have heard all that from the lassie? My mates, they got me off to the Hospital, and the doctor there, he dressed my face. And, do ye know, mistress, it wasn't till the dressings and strappings was removed I knew that I was blind. Nor my mates. And they had to tell me—mind you!—that the last strap was off. I couldn't have guessed it. I was thinking I should see. But it was all dark, and the doctor, he says: 'Sorry for you, my lad, but the sight's gone. Ask 'em in London; they'll tell you the same.' So my mates, they brought me away; and there was the sun, by the heat. But I could only see black, and I judged the doctor would be in the right of it, in the end. My mate Peter Cortright, he says, 'Never you fret, Jim; it'll all come right. Give 'em a week or so, and wear a pair o' blue spectacles a while, and you'll soon be forgetting all about it.' So I says to him, 'What did old Sam Nuttall say ten days a-gone?'"

"What did Peter say?" asked Miss Fossett.

"Well, ye see, Peter, he *knew!* My ship's owners, out at Cape Town, they were sorry, but in course no responsibility lay with them. I'd myself to blame. They gave me my passage home, and home I came, in the dark! Aboard of an old screw-collier from Liverpool, one o' the sart they call 'tramps.' Not fit for sarvice, and underhanded. And on to that dysentery, and half the crew down in their berths, doctorin' each other the best they might. Well!—I'll tell ye." Jim seems amused at this narration. "I was passing the time nigh to the binnacle, where the master and a young man with a fractured arm were steering at the wheel; for the rudder-chains, they'd fouled and got jammed, and there was nothing for it but to run a file through 'em and free the rudder, so they could work the starn-wheel, kept as a resarve. Ye see? . . . Well!—the master, he'd been thirty-eight hours at it, and he just gave out. So I made bold to suggest he should go to his berth, and I should put a bit of force on the handles, and young O'Keeffe—that was the young man's name—had a pair of eyes in his head, and we'd make it out between the two of us. 'Keep her off two points when you see the flashlight,' says the master, and off he goes to his berth. And from then on, mistress, ye'll believe I did a stroke of work at that wheel, just clapping on at the given word. But that's the last bit of work, to call *work*, ever I did, or ever I shall do this side o' the grave." Jim's voice rang its saddest note till now, over the dire knowledge that had come to him that the joy of work could never be his again.

Miss Fossett thought, in the silence that followed, that Jim was

dwelling on thoughts of old times brought back by his old story. The fact was that her unfortunate reference to Lizarann "getting quite strong" had been slowly gathering force in a mind that found it hard to receive, and was beginning to call aloud for explanation. He began uneasily: "When you mentioned, lady, just now . . ." and stopped.

She saw what he meant, and saved him further words. "About Lizarann's health?" she said.

"Ah! Is anything amiss?"

"Oh no—nothing *amiss!*" She had begun too confidently. She had to retract somewhat. But there was nothing to cause the least uneasiness. A fatal word that! She saw its marked effect on Jim, and, though she felt about for some reassuring phrase that would not suggest the question, "Why reassure?" she found nothing she felt confident of getting to the end of successfully. When she did begin, Jim cut her short:

"Are ye keeping something back from me, lady?" His voice was firm and collected.

Adeline Fossett saw that it would have to be told in the end, and Jim would have to bear it. Better to rely on his manhood, but make the least of it. She replied with what was effectively an admission that something had been kept back. She said that the Rector had wanted to tell Jim the whole story at once, and exactly what the doctor had said, but Miss Caldecott had dissuaded him. What the doctor had said came to no more than this—that the child would want a good deal of care while she was growing. This phrase, which she had invented for the occasion, seemed good to her; it implied such confidence that Lizarann would grow. She decided against repeating the doctor's exact phrase, "She'll outgrow it with care—oh yes!" as it seemed to her somehow weaker, as a hopeful expression.

Jim was very silent over it, and Miss Fossett felt that nothing would be gained by fragmentary attempts to soften her main fact. Having said it, best leave it to be looked in the face. If it could be safely diluted, the Rector's testimony could be relied on to do that later. Rather than dwell on the subject, she preferred to wonder why the bee-inspection was so long on hand.

"I'm thinking maybe the young folk are too many for the old mother," said Jim. "But I doubt we shall hear the lassie sing out one o' these minutes." Then he went on quietly asking questions about Lizarann; as how long had the "uneasiness" been felt; to which the true answer, which was not given, would have been, "from the beginning." For Dr. Ferris's stethoscope had not

given an absolutely clean bill to the child's left lung. Then, what did the Rector himself really think? "Would he be minded to tell me himself, if I made bold to ask him?" said Jim.

"Tell you at once, of course!" said Miss Fossett. "He would have talked about it before, only he didn't want to alarm you. Next time you see him, ask him." This was much the best line to go on. But it was rather a relief when the bee-party came back, elevated by natural history, and anxious to impart new discoveries. "I never did shouted out 'Pi-lot,'" said Lizarann, "because Teacher said not to." And she was rather offensively vainglorious over this achievement, referring to it more than once.

When Miss Fossett returned to the Rectory, she said to Athelstan Taylor: "A nice mess I've made of it, Yorick!"

Said Yorick then, laughing: "What's the rumpus?"

"I've told Jim Coupland about Lizarann's chest."

"Hm-hm-hm! Ah well!—he's got to know. How did he take it?"

"Very well—but . . ."

"But, of course! Never mind, Addie. Don't you fret. I'm going round that way after lunch, and I'll call and see Jim."

This was about a month after Challis and his wife parted. But is it necessary to synchronize the events of the story so closely?

CHAPTER XLI

HOW JIM FOUND A MISSION IN LIFE, AND LIZARANN MOVED TO MRS. FORKS'S COTTAGE. OF A FINE AUTUMN, AND HOW ALL WAS RIGHT TILL SOMETHING WENT WRONG. OF A SEASIDE SCHEME, AND ITS EFFECTS ON JIM

If you stand up at the rifle-butts when they are not shooting, and look away from Royd village towards the Hall, you will see a sharp curve in the road, maybe a mile from Mrs. Fox's cottage on your left. You will identify that by the little shop built out from it towards the road, and the covered arbour where Jim smoked his pipe, over a year ago now at the date of the story. He continues to do so when not professionally employed. For Jim found an employment, strange to say, shortly after he talked to Adeline Fossett about Lizarann's health, and got his first scare about his little lass.

It is just within that curve of the road that his vocation is plied. Not for gain—nothing so low as that! His is an official appointment, in the gift of the Rector of Royd, and there is a parish fund of ij shillings a month, with the additional emolument of a fat capon at Christmas, for the man at the well-head. The Charity Commissioners have never found it out; and the Rector has long since appropriated the fund, and turned it into four shillings, with appendices and addenda; while a composition has been effected in the matter of the capon, the holder of the office receiving instead as much barker as is good for him, all the year round, whether actively employed or not. For the employment Jim had the luck to step into is one that may have to be suspended during hard winter weather, being, in fact, the turning of the well-handle whenever applicants come for water.

It was through Miss Fossett hearing that tale of Jim's, about how his blind strength had come in so mighty handy in that steerage business aboard of the under-manned coal-tramp. She recollected it when, on the afternoon of next day, it came out that the office of water-drawer was vacant, the last man at the well-head having retired at eighty-seven years of age. Not that he had turned the handle himself for a long time past. He had only

given official sanction to the efforts of customers; who, when very small, had to way-ut till soombody else coom for t' wa-ater. Obviously, Jim was made for the place, and the place for Jim. And he—poor chap!—for whom all personal life had merged in solid gloom and hampered movement, felt like the prisoner in solitary confinement whom the boy threw his pegtop and string to, through the bars.

It is hardly a fair comparison, though, for the lonely gaol-bird had to spin his top with never a soul to speak to, day or night, and Jim had constant intercourse with his species; for as soon as the cottagers round became alive to the fact that they could send little Mary or Sally with a pail to t' wa'all, with a reasonable chance of return in half-an-hour, his services were in constant requisition. Royd village is at least five hundred feet higher than Grime; and the light soil, though good for the beech-woods, is bad for the water-supply. That is why the Abbey Well, so-called, has a clear bucket-shoot of fifty fathoms before it strikes the water. So, even in answer to Jim's effective appeals, the supply came slowly; and there was plenty of time, before the responsible bucket came in sight, to hear family history from Mary or Sally, or the latest news from seniors with two large pails stirruped on a shoulder-saddle.

Besides, there was Jim's chief resource, to which all these were as nothing. There was his little lass. Whenever she was not complying with the Education Act, and whenever the weather permitted, the child was pretty sure to be with her father in the little semi-enclosure, half-hidden by hawthorns, where the well with its interesting parclose—some of it as old as the thirteenth century, if you choose—tempts the passing excursionist to stop and be antiquarian for five minutes; and to put a little jewel of a memory in some close corner of his brain, to be found there on a winter's night in the days to come, when all the excursions are over and the merry year is dead.

The fine warm months that followed Jim's entry on his duties were surely the halcyon months of his broken life. Because for all that he and Lizarann, with a sort of *ex-post-facto* optimism, had decided to construct an image of a glorious past from their memories of Bladen Street and Tallack Street, misgiving of the soundness of its materials would creep into *his* mind, at least; never to the child's. That image was all beaten gold and ivory to her. Tallack Street, that would have seemed to you and me a sordid avenue of hovels, grudgingly complying with a Building Act, and enclosing imperfectly a rich atmosphere of Lower Middle

Class families, was to Lizarann an illuminated stage on which moved the majestic figures of the heroes of her past, into which flitted at intervals visions of delights now extinct: organs with a monkey, that played slow, not to tax the nervous system of their obsessor; organs without, that played quick, so you could dance to it—played music-hall airs that had three phases apiece, and lent themselves to being done over and over again, and nobody any fault to find; the man with the drum that couldn't raise his voice to holler, and potatoes he run out of unless you looked sharp; and, above all, that pre-Wagnerian contrivance without a name, that you could set on and go round for a halfpenny all through the tune, and no cheating—so "Home, Sweet Home" was more popular than the National Anthem, along of the hextry at the end. And the highroad itself, that took two policemen to get them children safe acrost after Board-School! What a scene of maddening—more than Parisian—gaiety it was Saturday nights! And what a mysterious antechamber to some Institution undefined, but with a flavour of Trinity House or the Vatican, was that corner where it was wrote up, "Vatted Rum, fivepence-halfpenny!"

Jim lent himself, you may be sure, to gilding these remnants of bygone glory, whatever doubts he may have felt about them himself. Through that happy season when Lizarann could be so frequently his companion—for Dr. Sidrophel said the child couldn't be too much in the air: it would do her good rather than otherwise—recollections of Tallack Street and Vatted Rum Corner rang the changes on tales of the high-seas and the Flying Dutchman. Lizarann had never seen the sea! Wouldn't she just like to it! Patience! Lizarann was to see the sea in time.

Her domicile at the Rectory came to an end a week or so after her Daddy got his appointment. It had begun with what was intended to be a stay long enough to get rid of that bad inflammatory cold caught in London; had been prolonged at the petition of Phœbe and Joan till that half-a-mile-off tea-party at Royd Park. After this it consisted of postponements, due to reluctance that she should run risks from moving till quite strong again, but growing shorter and shorter as Dr. Pordage laid more and more stress on the definite character of the chest-delicacy, and the modern belief in its communicability. And the fact was that Aunt Bessy, and, indeed, the Rector, were not a little ill at ease about the constant association of the children. The Rector tried to fence with his own uneasiness, and made but a poor show.

"*I* don't know!" said he to his sister-in-law. "Only a few years since doctors were treating the idea with derision. Now

it's all the other way. You never know where to have 'em—never!"

"Do as you like, Athel! But I'm for being on the safe side, if you ask me." And the Rector was obliged to admit to himself that accepting the advice that enjoins caution is a very different thing from running a risk on permission given. The doctor said that if all disorders were accounted infectious until the contrary was shown to be the case, it would be a good thing for the public, but a bad one for the profession and the bacilli. A man must live. So must a bacillus, from his point of view.

Discussion was afoot at one time about the possibility of sending Lizarann to Tunis, where the ex-incumbent of St. Vulgate's would take her in hand and look after her. He was sending highly-coloured reports of his own progress. But these schemes never fructified. The fact, though it was admitted, that it would have been an excessive interpretation of Samaritan good-nature had less to do with their rejection than the inevitable separation of the child from her father. "She'll never come back to England if she goes," said Dr. Sidrophel; meaning that she would only be safe in Africa if she did outgrow her symptoms. But would she be sure to outgrow them?—said Athelstan Taylor, Miss Fossett, and Miss Caldecott, all at once. "That's more than I would swear to," said the doctor. It was a relief, because *you* know what a stiff job this sending patients abroad is. Most of us do.

But, short of sending Lizarann to be nursed in an anti-tubercular climate, everything was done for her that could have been done in Samaria itself, with additions up-to-date, such as ozone, peptone, hypophosphites, and several other "ites" and "ones."

So dexterously was her removal to Mrs. Fox's cottage brought about that neither she nor her Daddy ever had a suspicion of the truth. Obviously, so everyone thought, the reason was that she should guide her Daddy to the well-head every morning before going to school, and bring him back in the evening. Lizarann's rejoicing over her importance made up to her for her separation from Phœbe and Joan. The whole manœuvre was executed without a mishap, and Lizarann started in the summer weather to install her Daddy in safety, and to return for him in the course of the afternoon, duly calling out "Pi-lot!" at a chosen point. Phœbe and Joan gave her up with reluctance, but acknowledged the force of the reasons for the change. They were plausible.

Mrs. Fox put her to sleep in a sweet little room under the thatch, with a lattice-window you could stand open and hear the

wind in the trees all night. And a bed with a white tester and a fringe, and a white vallance all round underneath. Only the curtains were chintz, with roses done on them, shiny-like; and the counterpane was made of pieces of everything sewn together. Wherever anyone could have got 'em all from Lizarann couldn't think.

From underneath which counterpane the occupant of that bed continued an early riser throughout those three satisfactory months. Because Lizarann had nothing the matter with her. Ridiculous! Why shouldn't she cough if she chose? That was her view. And why shouldn't she go to the window to see how the sunflower was getting on! The sunflower grew on a giant plant that had shot up flush with the roof—a record in growth. Lizarann looked out at it every morning, and wondered how big ever *was* it going to get. She didn't know which she liked best, the back or the front of that sunflower. Sunflower-backs are very fascinating.

She had a little triumph over her Daddy and Mrs. Forks about that window. For they belonged to the old school of nursing, which went for suffocation, and had told her not to go to the window at six in the morning in her nightgown. Dr. Sidrophel, when appealed to, said: "Hurt you to go to the open window? Not a bit of it! More open windows the better!" So Lizarann kept on looking out at it until the rime frostis come in October; and then Jarge coot it off for her, not too high up to the coop, and Lizarann's prevision that it would be as big as her head was shown to be very, very far short of truth.

"There, now, Daddy," said the convalescent, on her way to the well, with her convoy in tow, after Dr. Sidrophel had endorsed the views of the new school so vigorously. "Dr. Spiderophel said I was-s-s-s-S quite well!" The climax of a prolonged sibilant, *crescendo*, burst like a shell against the coming initial, and stung its adverb to vigorous action.

"Who said you warn't, lassie?" said her father, affecting indignation.

"Phœbe and Jones. And Mr. Yorick, he's always for asking what did the doctor said."

"Vary right and proper, little lass! Wouldn't ye have him know? Nay-tur-ally, such a good gentleman likes to know you're well. That's where the enquiring comes in. He'd be martal sorry to hear the lassie was ill. What do ye make out the young ladies said?" Jim's tactics of raising false issues were compatible with an attempt at a side-light on public opinion.

"Phœbe and Jones said—nurse said—Dr. Spiderophel said"—here concentration became necessary—"that simpsons was favourable, but to continue the medicine two stable-spoonfuls free times a day." She then corrected herself, as though the pronunciation might vitiate the treatment. "No!—*three* times a day." And added corroboratively, "Yass!"

Jim knew that the sky-sign of an engineering firm in the neighbourhood of Tallack Street was responsible for a confusion of the little lass's ideas, or at least speech. He accepted the name, to escape discussion, saying: "If Simpson's is favourable, and the medecine's nice, what more can a lassie want? In coorse you're quite well, with such like medecine. When little lass's medecine's nasty, that's when they're ill."

Optimism in any form was welcome on such an autumn morning, with such a many larks afloat in the blue above the shorn stubble-fields—more songs than Lizarann could count, in token of a million more unheard—and the Royd church-bell striking seven a mile off, and some sheepbells making it difficult to hear if it struck right; and the same bees as last month making the same noise about an entirely new supply of honey. Besides, Daddy had to be guided through the sheep, who were filling up the road on ahead, and repeating themselves sadly, though in a variety of keys. Sheep ought never to come in the opposite direction, because no dog can influence them to leave other people space to pass. This time they would have been enough alone to knock medical discussion on the head, even if there had been no other distracting combinations.

During just that fine perfect autumn time no one who was not in the confidence of that useless implement of Dr. Sidrophel's, that you could neither play on nor see through, would have picked out Lizarann as a patient at all. The change came with the chill of the year. Not the first morning frost of all; that, when it scatters diamond drift, every speck of which means to be a mirror to the great sun it knows is coming—coming from beyond the Eastern red, to quench the glow of the Morning Star—is but a fall of temperature, with repentance to follow. It is all right again after breakfast. But the real chill of the year comes soon—too soon! And then there is sunshine at Westminster; and it's going to snow, and does it. And you have fires, and catch cold.

It all happened just as usual that year. Only something had gone wrong with Lizarann. She was no longer the Lizarann of Tallack Street, to whom the first frost that meant business, the first fog that meant to interrupt it, the first fire we did without

and the first we didn't—a day or five minutes later, according to our powers of endurance—were one and all mere annual incidents, fraught with holly and mistletoe and intensification of butchers. In those days Lizarann's greeting to winter was to go out in the snow and avail herself of it as ammunition, or develope it as slides. In these, as often as not it was doubtful whether she would be allowed out at all. And even if it was only to the little schoolroom near the church, not unless she was wropt up real careful, and her red woollen comforter round and round and round, like that. The way was never so in Tallack Street.

Lizarann herself confused between cause and effect. She ascribed her cough to mixtures, and a place in her chest, that prevented her coughing and done with it, to its location by that malign little stethoscope. It was either that or the linseed meal of Teacher's careful slow poulticing that had done it all. She considered that the linseed meal had penetrated through that vermilion disc on the area she called her chest, which had afforded her such unmixed amusement seen in Miss Fossett's little hand-mirror. She was haunted by the flavour of that linseed meal; was convinced it had got through and stuck. But these were views she kept to herself. She tolerated the strange scientific fancies and fallacies of the grown-up world, recognizing in them the benevolence of its intentions.

But the something that had gone wrong never made any real concession. It seemed to have made up its mind which direction it would take, and jogged on without remorse. Now and again it may have sat down by the roadside, and set the credulous a-thinking that it might turn back and start again and go right; but it always went on again refreshed in the end. Sometimes it travelled slowly—came to a hill, perhaps? But the road was a give-and-take road, only just a little more downhill than up. It always is, in this complaint.

Dr. Sidrophel gave the Rector very little hope of any real success. He did not say the child would die. Nobody ever says that. He only said she would never make old bones. He probably thought her skeleton would not reach its teens. He continued the treatment; was in favour of plenty of air, plenty of nourishment, the last new chemical *elixir vitæ*—wasn't it called "Maltozone," and didn't every teaspoonful contain an ox from Argentina?—and so on. The cottage smelt of iodine; and dear old Mrs. Fox's lozenges, which had been active in the early stages of the complaint, had to die away before the new agencies and real prescriptions that had to go to the village apothecary to be made up.

Even so the parish engine, that the fire took no notice of, has to give way to the brigade from the nearest station. If only the metaphor would hold good a little farther! If only the parallel could be found for the efficiency of the waterblast that comes so swiftly on the heels of their arrival—steam at high-pressure panting to show its elasticity to advantage—blood-horses that have touched the last speed-record—serpent-coils of hose that mean salvation; if only the latest rescue-powers of Science were on all fours with these! But . . . Well!—we must hope.

When Sir Rhyscombe Edison, the great London physician, paid a visit to the Hall just before the Family started to go abroad—no one was ill there: it was the head of Thanes Castle he was summoned to consult about—Lady Arkroyd begged him to overhaul a little patient she and the Rector were interested in. He made as careful an examination of Lizarann as he had done of the Duke; was as encouraging to the one patient about her chest as he had been to the other about his hemiplegia; and was nearly as explicit in his second verdict to her ladyship and the Rector as he had been in his first to the family at Thanes. It was a well-marked characteristic case, but one lung was free, so far; and as long as that was so the duration—by which he meant the duration of the patient—was a thing the ablest pathologist in the world could not pronounce upon. The little thing might live to be an old woman—at Davos. He instanced cases of one-lung life in the high Alps going on to old age. But in England, no! . . . Still, she might go on for a year or so. Sea-air would be the best thing. Anywhere on the south coast.

Do not suppose that any means were left undiscussed that could be reasonably entertained of sending Lizarann to live by the sea. The higher Alps did not come into practical politics. But there were sea-possibilities. Inquiry discovered nursing homes, havens of convalescence, where a very moderate payment would obtain sea-breezes and good food and medical supervision for a patient either curable or doomed—either would do. But the separation of the child from her father would have been almost inevitable. The thing worked out so; all details would want too much telling. Besides, Lizarann's friends flinched from sending her to live among "cases" confessed and palpable. It had too much of the character of surrender. How could the truth be softened to her father, if it came to that?

It had come out through Mrs. Fox, who held a roving commission to tell Jim things gradually, that a scheme was under consideration for packing off both together, father and daughter, to a

cottage by the seaside. It had been pronounced quixotic, and condemned, before Mrs. Fox had an opportunity to report its effect on Jim; so what she told of had no influence in procuring its rejection. But it made its impracticability less to be regretted.

"It would just be like to carry on, Mr. Coupland." So the old woman, extenuating absence from Royd in any form. "It might be a bit lonesome, and I would miss your pipe of an evening—so I tell 'ee! But what is three months, after all, when you come to name it?" Mrs. Fox, with true tact, ignored the main evil, the cause of the whole, and chose her own loss as the thing to dwell upon.

"It's not a big turnover of time," said Jim. A moment after he said, referring back: "That's very kind of ye, mother, about the pipe. Thank ye kindly!"

"You've no need to thank me, Mr. Coupland. All the fill-out of the smoke's away up the big chimney in the thoroughdraft, when there's a bit of flare to help it. I like to watch it find its way. Summer-time the gap of the little window scarcely favours the letting of it out. More by token, too, I can mind the many that's gone, by the very smell. My husband, he would always have a yard o' clay . . . ah!—that name he gave it. . . ."

"I know 'em, mother. Churchwa'ardens they call 'em."

"That sort. And my Daniel, he'd none of 'em, but just a cherry-wood. I can hear the voices of them now, in the smoke."

"Thank ye, mother, for leave given, too! But I'd bring ye back the little lass, safe and sound. Afore the end o' January would be the time."

"'Tis nothing to speak of. But this I do tell 'ee, Mr. Coupland: I shall have a fair miss of the little maid, with her clack."

"Ah—the little lass! But she'll have the more to tell ye, mother, when she comes again in the spring-time. All set up and hearty, hay?"

It was then that the dear old thing, with the best of intentions, made a mistake. She must needs refer—bless her!—to the length of time that had passed since ever Jim had seen the sea. Then, concerned at the sound of the blind man's "Ah, mother!" she misinterpreted her mistake, conceiving it to have been in the reference to sight. Poor old lady! How hurt she was when she found it out!

Jim was equally concerned on her account. He understood what her thought had been almost before she had begun to explain. "Oh no, no, mother!" he cried out, filling the little cottage with his big voice. "Never you think it was that! Where should we

be if I couldn't bide to hear a word about my own bad luck? It don't make it neither more nor less, ye know! And it might just as easy have been anybody else." Jim's meaning was that the sum of human misery had been arranged, and this tribulation had to be borne by someone, to balance. If *he* had it, someone else escaped. "No, no," he continued; "that's not to be thought on, mother!"

But there had been a something, very distinct; and it was equally clear that Mrs. Fox would like to know what, without asking intrusively. Besides, Jim wanted to make that wrong guess a thing of the past. He would try to explain why he was so moved. "It's none so easy, mother, now and again, to say just what you have an inklin' to say. Not if the other party's to understand, mind you! But . . . did ye never see the sea, mother?" No—Mrs. Fox had never seen the sea. But she had been in Worcestershire, to her uncle's, many was the time. Jim declined Worcestershire, but gently, not to seem scornful. "It might be a far-off sight," he said. "Not like seafaring folk see it, from sun-up to sun-up; just a fair offing all round ye, and the sky overhead." However, Worcestershire had only been referred to that the old lady might not seem quite untravelled. So Jim returned to his explanation. "It was just a queer feel I had," said he, "about the sound of it again, after such a many years."

Mrs. Fox's slip of the tongue had given her a fright, and she sat silent. A log tumbled on the great open hearth, and a shower of sparks went up the chimney to whirl away in the wind that was roaring down it about the cold white drift of the winter night. Jim sat and thought of his watches out upon the sea, and the same wind whistling through the shrouds, and his strong arm and keen eyesight in the days gone by. All gone—for ever! Nights by the galley-fire, or in some warm corner of a steamer's 'tween-decks, welcome in the spells of look-out duty, when the look-out was for icebergs in the Atlantic—the sort that wait till a ship is well alongside, and choose a clever moment to turn turtle and catch her in the nick. Nights in sailing traders—there are some left still—on a still sea in the tropics, with not a breath of wind below, and strange activity of meteors in an unresponsive universe of stars above. Nights of battle with the storm-fiend—of whirling spray-drench and decks swept by the torrent of the crested seas, all vanished in the past, with that little wicked reason in between that lay in ambush for Jim's eyes on the quay at Cape Town, in the bunghole of an oil-cask.

And then the broken sailor said to his heart: "Can we bear it,

you and I?—we that have borne so much; we that must live perforce in dread of so much more still left to bear; we that may even have to say good-bye to the little voice that has been the stronger half of our strength till now? But this—oh, this!—to stand again in hearing of the sea; to know it as of old by the endless intermittent rush of the shoaling beach in its caress, by the music of the curling ridge of its wavelets, nearer, nearer to the shore; to breathe the scent of it in the landward wind—and then! . . . What then? Just to go mad in an aching void of darkness, and cry out in agony for but one glimmer of the daylight that has been once and shall never be again, just one momentary image of the living world that void can never know.

Presently Mrs. Fox rose, saying quietly, "It's the remindin' brings it back," and busied herself to get some toddy for her tenant. She condemned a lemon-scrap as too dry; her stimulated pity for poor Jim suggested a new one from "the shop," and she disappeared to get it. Jim sat on in the glimmering firelight he did not know from sunshine, thinking of the sea. He did not put his consolatory pipe down; it was something, if not much, against thoughts that ran close on the lines the story guessed for them, if not word for word. But it could not stop the tears that *would* come from the eyes that were good now for nothing else but to shed them.

CHAPTER XLII

HOW A NAUGHTY LITTLE GIRL CAME OUT IN THE COLD AND TALKED TO HER DADDY. AND HOW WINTER MADE HER WORSE. OF A TALK BETWEEN THE RECTOR AND MISS FOSSETT, AND A SUGGESTION SHE MADE TO HIM

A LITTLE bare foot came stealing down the twisted oak stair at the far end of the room, which leads straight up to Lizarann's eyrie where Jarge got the sunflower through the window for her not three months ago. The little white figure in a nightgown is taller than the Lizarann whom we saw, also in her nightgown, rushing out into the snow last winter to summon the police to Uncle Bob. But the robust look of childhood has given place to what is at least an entire unfitness to be out of bed in the cold. If Mrs. Fox had not been lemon-hunting in the shop, she would have sent the delinquent back in double-quick time. Jim's sharp ears caught the patter of the shoeless feet.

"That's the lassie, I lay," said he. And Lizarann, who didn't care, was on his knee before he had got a proper reproach ready. All he could say was, "A little lass out of her bed in the middle of the night! Where's the police, hay?" He affected inability to deal with the case in the absence of the civil authority.

"I come down because it wasn't cold," said Lizarann. "I come down because the stackace is mide of wood. I come down for to kiss my daddy very often." She did so.

Jim called to Mrs. Fox, without. "Mother! Ahoy! Here's a young charackter come out of her bed in the cold."

Mrs. Fox testified to her horror and surprise, saying substantially that, even in the most depraved circles she had mixed with, such a thing as a little girl coming out of bed in the middle of the night was quite outside her experience. Jim suggested that a blanket would be useful as protection, inside which Lizarann could watch him through his toddy, after assisting in its preparation. Mrs. Fox went for the blanket.

"'Tin't cold," said Lizarann. "And there hin't any cold wind outside in the road. Only in the chimbley. . . . I'm thicker than I was, Daddy." This last was in response to Jim's explorations about her small limbs in search of flesh. Dr. Sidrophel had

been a little hopeful about the possible effect of the *ones* and *ites*, if persevered in.

"Where's the flesh you was going to put on, the doctor said? Hey, lassie? Sure you haven't put it on some other little lass?"

Lizarann seemed very uncertain—perhaps didn't understand the question. "Old Mrs. Willoughby, lives near the Spost-Office," she says, "medgers eighteen inches round, and her son Gabriel does the horse-shoes." This is not irrelevance; its object is to show that fat is not always an advantage. Jim misunderstands its drift, and conceives that Mrs. Willoughby is brought forward as an example of slimness and its robust consequences.

"That's no great shakes, anyhow," says he; "for round an old lady's waist . . ."

But Lizarann interrupts. "I didn't sye wyste," she says. "Round her arms with string above the elber. She hin't got a wyste. She's all one piece. Yass!" Then Mrs. Fox returns, and throws a light on old Mrs. Willoughby. She is her cousin Catharine, and is dropsical. What set the child off on her, she asks?

Jim explains. "The lassie wasn't so far out, mother," he says. "You may have too much of a good thing. Only . . ." But he doesn't finish.

And Mrs. Fox, when she afterwards told Athelstan Taylor things about Jim, recalled how, at this interview, she could see him always feeling, feeling gently, about the little feet and hands that came out of the blanket she had wrapped about the child. "I did all I could to give him heart," she said then. "But I couldn't say too much about looks, because he could see with his finger-tips, as you might say."

In fact, old Mrs. Fox could offer very little in the way of reassurance, and had to fall back upon a resource that had already been freely drawn upon—the growth of little girls and the attenuation that was alleged to accompany it, though really an appeal was being made to conditions of development that belong to growing children over eight years old. Probably Jim saw through all this. But he did not want to discourage those who wished to give him hope. What though it *were* to be hope against hope—by which one means hope against fear, with despair in the bush—was not their goodwill as good, whatever foes were in league against him?

But, except it were just this once, Jim never allowed his fears to leak out. He could lock them up in his own bosom, and endure life to the end. If he lost his little lass, why!—that *was* the end

of things. He looked forward to it, if it was to be, as a believer in the possibility of his own extinction may look forward to the guillotine. Only, the knife-edge of this guillotine of Jim's was to touch his neck and spring back, then do the same again, then just draw blood and spare him—a guillotine-cat at play with a human heart. But as for showing his fears to the little lass—no more of that!

This was in January. The child was then still enjoying life, with the drawback of that nasty cough. It was only a few weeks since she had been up in the early morning to see her Daddy to his field of operations. Why was that stopped, and why was Lizarann so ready to surrender, and even to remain in bed till the day got warm and she could go out? It was all put down to the winter days. But who ever gave a thought to the winter days in Tallack Street? She firmly believed in her heart that, if only the medicine-bottles were flung on a dust-heap, and she and Daddy were to go back to their old lives, she would still be able to wait his coming in the cold, and perhaps tell all about the Flying Dutchman again to old Mother Groves, and hear more of the strange experiences of the Turk. She identified her old health with her surroundings at that time, and credited *them* with claims for gratitude really due to *it*.

However, the exhilarating bygone time had disappeared. Perhaps it was the healthy, bracing influence of Aunt Stingy that she missed, and the occasional stimulus, when Jim was afar, of a strap or a slipper? Perhaps it was Uncle Bob? Perhaps it was The Boys? If she and Bridgetticks were shouting defiances to them—now this moment, through the snow—would it make her cough? She scouted the idea. It never used to it. Indeed, she did not feel sure that Bridgetticks might not prove, if fairly tried, worth quarts of Chloric Ether. A dream hung about her waking consciousness of Bridgetticks and the Turk, mysteriously visitors to relatives in the neighbourhood of Royd, and of a wild escapade to the highest ridge of a hill in the neighbourhood, in the snow. At the end of that dream an imaginary self passed through the mind of the little pale dreamer, a robust young self and a rosy, that broke in upon an image of Daddy at his hour for leaving the well-head, with, "Me and this boy and Bridgetticks, we been right up atop of Crumwen, and I haven't coftited not wuntst, the whole time!" A little of that sort of thing would set her up. But she wasn't going to say so. She loved the big Rector and Phœbe and Jones, and Mrs. Forks, and even poor Dr. Spiderophel, with his scientific delusions, far too much to hint that they could be mistaken. They should have it all their way, they should!

Athelstan Taylor became quite hopeful about the little girl during that January and February. He paid Lizarann a visit at intervals—very short ones when her absences from school were frequent. According to the reports he carried to Miss Caldecott and his own little girls, the patient took a decided turn for the better so often that a very few weeks should have sufficed to qualify her to practise as an Amazon. Phœbe and Joan were quite satisfied that when papa and aunty took them up to town in autumn Lizarann would come too, and then they would all go to see Madame Tussaud's, Westminster Abbey, and Tallack Street Especially the last. But this expedition never came off.

When Teacher from London came again about Easter time she was disappointed. She did not find what she had been led to suppose she would; not by any conscious exaggeration of the Rector's, but by his genuine over-hopefulness, backed by groundless mis-statements of fact from the little woman herself contained in very well-written letters enclosing hieroglyphs that meant kisses. Adeline Fossett took the first opportunity of finding out whether the patient was still a self-acting Turkish Bath in the small hours, or dry. Her observations were not satisfactory. But there!—you know all about cases of this sort; at least, we expect you do, though we hope you don't.

"I wish we could get her to the seaside," said she. "Any of those places would do. You know, Yorick, you are just as anxious to save the little person as I am. Every bit!"

"My dear Addie!—of course I am. The idea! But we mustn't talk of *saving* her, yet. I should say *losing* her, perhaps; but you know what I mean. We can talk to Sidrophel—see what he says."

So the doctor was referred to, and his opinion amounted to this: that if the child went away by herself to any sort of hospital or home, she would either have to be indoors with the other patients, or exposed to all the windy gusts of spring on the sea-beach, or perhaps in a shelter with a fine sea-view. People were always hunting climates that didn't exist, and inflicting horrible hardships on themselves in the chase. When summer by the sea was a certainty, send her, by all means. After midsummer, he should say; no sooner!

This was in early April, just when a misleading rush of crocuses into a treacherous few days of sunshine had set folk off hoping for a real spring this year; like when we were young—like Chaucer—like Spenser. Some mistaken nightingales arrived, and must have felt foolish. Infatuated orchards promised themselves a crop of pears; it even went as far as that!

"We may be thankful for one thing, at any rate," said the Rev. Athelstan to Miss Fossett two or three weeks after. "We did *not* pack off that little wench to the seaside. In weather like this she's best where she is, on the whole. Sidrophel's right. He often is."

"He was right this time. Just look at it!" Sleet was the thing referred to.

"Werry bad state the roads are in, sir," says a third party in this conversation. "Bad alike for 'orse and man. Thankee, sir!" He was a cabman, and he had just driven this lady and gentleman over five miles, so he knew. He departs with the post-script sixpence his last words procured, as an extra concession after an over-liberal fare, and his late tenants pass in at the door of the little house that is part of the school-building where Lizarann developed that first inflammatory cold months ago. The story is back for the moment on the Cazenove Estate, and the Rector is going presently to walk over to the new incumbent at St. Vulgate's, who will house him to-night, and tell of his few sheep and many goats. He can stay for a cup of tea now, and get there by seven.

"Yes, the doctor was right. She's just as well off under Mrs. Fox's thatch. Better! When the warm weather comes we'll send her for six weeks to Chalk Cliff, and give her a good set-up!" But his hearer only sees her way to silence on this point.

The story has told, but very slightly, the strange *rapport* between these two, that had lasted through so many years. For over twenty they had elected to pose as brother and sister. During all that time the mind of each had referred to the other as in some sense the principal person; that is the only way to express their thought. When Athelstan first adored the fascinating Sophia Caldecott, he really could hardly have said which he wanted most, that young person herself, or Gus's sister's sympathy about her. But so blind was he at the time, so blind had he remained through all the years of his married life, that he never conceived that, midmost among all her memories of the past, a lurid star outshining all the others, was the record of that hour when the young man she thought and spoke of as a boy, remembered so well, came to her father's house intoxicated with a new-found joy, to tell her chiefly and above all others that he was affianced to—well!—to the wrong sister; not the friend she had set her heart on!

As they sat there by the fire in the half-dark, resting after their journey, his mind, like hers, went off on old times. Presently he shook off his own burden of memories with, "Well!—I suppose I ought to be on the move."

"Don't hurry away. It's not much past five yet, and they can make dinner half-past seven. You've plenty of time."

The flicker of the fire has the best of what is left of the light of a dull day; it shows two faces serious enough, certainly, but not sad. They are dwelling on the same past, each from its own point of view; but their owners are really happy to eke out a little more time in the half-light, each knowing the heart of the other. They are glad dinner at St. Vulgate's can be half-past seven; it is half-an-hour longer to be together, and really those people in the train had made it impossible to talk.

"I shan't see you again for ever so long, Yorick, unless you and Bessy change your minds and come up earlier."

"You must manage a visit to Royd in July."

"If I can!—it depends. But . . ."

The Rector glanced shrewdly up. "But anything particular?" said he.

"Well, Yorick, yes! Something particular. Only I don't know how to say it." As she sits there, a little flushed—or is it only the firelight?—one hand a face-rest, the other coaxing the burning coals into groups with a persuasive poker, the question that suggests itself is the old one—how comes she to be an old maid? A six-and-thirty maid, at any rate!

"I know what it's about, Addie. It's the Bill, and the Bishop."

"Yes, dear old boy." This was a great relief. "Now, do tell me, what shall you do?"

"You mean if the Bill passes?"

"Yes."

"I shall do nothing. Why should I?"

"Not even if Dr. Barham . . .?"

"Dr. Barham can *do* nothing. He can only remonstrate. What was it he said to Lady Arkroyd?"

"That if the Bill passed it would be his duty to point out to you that your relations . . . well!—your relation with Bessy had altogether changed since the Act; and that for a clerk in holy orders to keep house with any single lady not his sister by parentage would be . . . well!—would not do at all."

"And what did Lady Arkroyd say to the Bishop?"

"Not herself; it was the Duchess. Only she told me. What the Duchess said was, 'I hope if you do, the Reverend Athelstan will bring a suit against you for libel, and make you smart for it.' Dr. Barham won't speak to her Grace now."

"Dr. Barham would be quite within his rights. No action for libel could possibly lie. Any remonstrance on a matter of

morality within his diocese must be a Bishop's privilege. Besides, a written letter would hardly constitute publication. . . ."

"Dear old Yorick! I wonder why men are so fond of talking law to women, as if they knew by nature and women didn't. Never mind the law! It isn't that. . . . Don't you see how disagreeable it would be for Bessy?"

"No—I don't know that I do. I don't see why Bess need bother herself about it. . . ."

"Hm . . . !"

"Oh—well—yes! Yes, I do—of course I do! It would be detestable for Bess."

"You see I'm right?"

"Oh yes, absolutely. It was only my perversity." A self-excusing, deprecatory shoulder-shrug. *Peccavit confitetur* is its import. Then he breaks into a good-humoured laugh. "After all, you know, there's always a way out of the difficulty."

Something brings a sudden exclamation from Adeline Fossett. "Yes, what?—but go on!" She has risen from her seat, and stands with her hands pressed close together, and eyes of expectation fixed on his. "Oh, Yorick!—is it—is it . . . Oh, I do hope . . . *is* it the one I've thought of?" She hesitates. He hesitates.

"That depends on *what* you have thought," he says at last. But with a suspicion that they may have thought alike, too.

"Oh, if I dared guess! . . . I don't know; dare I? . . . —yes, I will—I don't care! . . ."

"Go on!"

"If the Bill passes, you know . . . then . . . then . . . you and Bessy to get married! Was that your idea, Yorick? Oh, do tell me!"

"Why, of course it was."

Miss Fossett throws herself back in her chair again, with a deep sigh as of relief. "Oh dear, how nice that would be!" she says. But she is taking it all to heart, and her eyes are full of tears. The Rector is very cool over it.

"It would be a way out of the difficulty," he says. "Not a bad one, perhaps. Better, at any rate, than Bess having to turn out and leave the children. They are quite like her own, you see. And it wouldn't make any difference." This is not quite understood, apparently, and he adds: "Everything would go on exactly as usual."

Miss Fossett had a sort of feeling that it might be possible to parade an unlover-like attitude too far. Athelstan surely might

warm up a little. He had spoken as he might have done if marriage were a new hat. It would, or wouldn't, fit. "You would . . . like it, though—wouldn't you?" she asked, in a rather frightened sort of way.

"It would suit me very well. I shouldn't like the only other expedient—marrying somebody else to make up a possible housekeeping. We both should know exactly why we had done it, and we should gain the end proposed. It would rather be for Bess to decide if she would like such a very prosaic arrangement."

"You mean chilly?"

"No, I don't. We're not chilly now, Bess and I. And we never quarrel. The temperature wouldn't go down because we had deferred to the opinion of our diocesan." He drew out his watch, "I must go. . . . Don't think I'm not in earnest, Addie. If the Bill passes, I might have to ask Bess to settle the point. I should do it for the sake of the children. The worst of it would be that if she negatived the idea, we might be uncomfortable afterwards. As for her leaving the children, of course that's out of the question. And I couldn't have her carry them off, like poor Challis's wife. . . . I *must* go." He got up to depart.

"I'm disappointed, Yorick," said Adeline.

"What at, Addie?"

"Why, of course she wouldn't have you on those terms."

"Just consider! If you were in her place?"

"Well—*I wouldn't!* Not on *those* terms." She seemed to mean every syllable.

The Rector stood in the passage, buttoning his overcoat. "Poor Challis!" said he, going back on the conversation. "They've made a knight of him! I shall go and look for him before I go back. I fancy he's back in town."

"You know I don't agree, Yorick?'

"What about?"

"About 'poor Challis.'" These words were said in inverted commas. "I told you, don't you remember, that I had heard all about it from the other side—from Charlotte Eldridge."

"Yes, but you were biassed against him, because of his deceased wife's sister marriage. You know you were!"

"Well!—wasn't I right?" But there is an amused twinkle in the Rector's eye, which is understood. "Oh no, Yorick, no!—it's *quite* a different thing. . . ."

"Before and after an Act of Parliament, is that it?"

But Adeline has run her ship on the sands, and must back off. "It's impossible to compare the two cases," she says. "Do you

know, if you are to be at St. Vulgate's by seven-thirty, you'll want a cab. You can't carry what you're pleased to call your little valise and get there by then. *Do* take a cab, Yorick!"

"Fifty-five minutes does it," says Yorick. "And I've got fifty-seven. I've a great mind to spend the odd two reading you a little homily about consistency. . . ."

"Go away. Good-bye." A cordial shake of the hand is all that forms permit, and it seems such a shame!

One reason why it was impossible to compare the two cases was a perfectly clear one, to the thinking of Miss Fossett's innermost heart. But she kept it tight locked up there.

In the old days, when all her forecasts of life took her own practical exclusion from it for granted, and wrote celibacy large on every page of her record-volume, her great dream had been to unite her beloved friend Bessy Caldecott to that dearest of all possible young fellows, her brother Gus's friend Athelstan. Adeline was a little prone to playing at Providence, and—don't you see?—Bessy was so good and sound, and so much better altogether than that showy little sister of hers. So, what wonder, when Athelstan led the family minx, Sophy, to the altar, that Adeline rather than otherwise wished that the earth would open and swallow the altar? She would have resented the idea that any personal feeling entered into the matter.

Even so in these new days, with all this change, she could and did believe that she could see her old girl friend the wife of her old boy friend, without any feeling but sheer rejoicing that Yorick had married the right sister after all. And this feeling entered strangely into her real views on the Deceased Wife's Sister question. Catechized closely, she might have confessed to a belief in real wives, with a sub-creed that marriage with a sister of one was somehow a worse desecration of a sacrament than marriage with a second cousin, for instance, or a mere female undefined. There was no evidence to show that Challis hadn't married the right sister first. If he hadn't, of course the "living in Sin" business had come off in the first act of his drama, and nothing was needed but an Act of Parliament to qualify the parties to live in purity, ungrundied.

At any rate, those were the lines on which Miss Fossett would have justified her friend's defiance of his Bishop. And when Yorick had referred to that other way of solving his problem—marriage with the female undefined—she had shut any hint of that female being defined as herself into the very core of her heart with a snap.

CHAPTER XLIII

CHALLIS'S VISIT TO THE RECTORY. A VISIT TO JIM AT THE WELL. HOW LIZARANN WAS AT THE SEASIDE. ST. AUGUSTIN'S SUMMER. HOW THEY MET SALADIN. HOW CHALLIS TOLD ALL

"HAVE him down here if you like, Athel," said Miss Caldecott to her brother-in-law on the first of August, a little over three months later. "I shall be in London with Phœbe and Joan. So it can't matter to me. Only I think he ought to be on honour."

"How do you mean, aunty?"

"You know what I mean. On honour not to."

"Not to what?" But Aunt Bessy wasn't going to answer questions on the subject, whatever it was. So she closed her eyes in harmony with an expressive lip-pinch, and said *finis* dumbly to this chapter of the conversation. However, she began another.

"Apart from that, I don't like his tone," said she.

"I know you don't." This meant that the Rector didn't want the second chapter. He harked back to the first. "Perhaps Sir Challis will promise not to," said he.

"I don't see how you can ask him." This was said very dryly, and the speaker indicated that it was an ultimatum by going on with a letter she was writing.

For Miss Caldecott was a sort of inverse Charlotte Eldridge. To the latter lady, as we know, the mention of a lady and gentleman, as such, and such only, was as the sound of battle to the war-horse. The former was very apt to petrify if the conversation went outside the limits of the neuter gender without stipulating for a strict neutrality on the part of the other two. A hint of what Mrs. Protheroe called "going on" on the part of properly—or improperly—qualified masculines and feminines was enough to make Aunt Bessy discover that we must be getting back, and begin looking for those children's gloves.

Why Adeline Fossett had yearned to link the lives of this lady and her friend Yorick was very difficult to guess. That, however, does not belong to the story at present. Its business is with the lady and gentleman responsible for the little bit of frigidity it has just recorded.

When Athelstan Taylor called at the Hermitage in April, just

after Challis's arrival in England, he threw out, in thoughtless hospitality, a suggestion that the latter should pay him a visit in the Autumn. The invitation was jumped at, and the Rector perceived afterwards that there might have been a reason for this, to the possibility of which he was at the moment not sufficiently awake. But he was too honourable to go back on his word.

If he had felt sure enough of his ground he might have spoken frankly to Challis, and put him off till some time when Judith's absence from the Hall was a certainty. But he had not enough to go upon for that. He found out the poverty of his case by attempting a letter to Challis. "My dear Challis—You know me, and I know you will excuse my speaking plainly. . . ." And then had to think what the plain speech was to be. He considered "I know that you and Miss Arkroyd are quite within your rights when, etc.," and "I think your wife's strange conduct has left you free to take advantage of what I should otherwise regard as a legal shuffle, etc."; and "I know you would not avail yourself of my hospitality to, etc."; and even "I can't have you making love to Judith Arkroyd while you are staying at the Rectory, etc."; but concluded by rejecting them all—he liked the last best—and tearing his letter to fragments.

He ended by saying to himself: "These are not young people, to be *chaperon*'d and guardianed. If they are in earnest, they will not be kept apart by *not* having Challis at my house. And the more I see of Challis the better my chance of influencing him towards the wiser course." A little sub-commune with his soul as to whether he was quite sure he was not being influenced by his relations with the county-families and the Bishop confirmed him, and Challis came down to Royd Rectory early in August. Thus it had come about that the Rector and his guest, one day in the middle of that month, were walking about in an early-morning garden—breakfast is very early at the Rectory when its master is by himself there—using up their subjects of conversation; or, rather, perhaps we should say, chat.

You know what a fool one always is about that, when one goes to stay with a friend; how one gets gravelled for lack of matter, and the old subjects have to do a second time, and more. Challis had come down from London by a late train the night before—too late to indulge in arrears of common topics then and there. That slaughter of the innocents had been postponed till next day.

"How's our poor friend blind Samson and his small daughter?" The recollection of Lizarann—more than a twelvemonth past, mind

you!—twinkles in the speaker's face as he blows a cloud from his invariable cigar.

"Lizarann's getting on capitally, according to the latest accounts. Samson's become a public character, and is making himself useful as a sort of human pump. Do you want a large bucket of water?"

"Not at this moment. But I may some time. Why?"

"When you do, Samson will wind you one up from under the chalk, as fine a bucket of water as you'll find in the country. It isn't good for gout, certainly. But otherwise it's perfect. Not the ghost of a microbe!"

"Perhaps the microbes were gouty, and died of it. An image of a well presents itself to me, with Samson everlastingly raising water, and villagers bearing it away in pails."

"You've got it exactly. We'll pay Samson a visit."

"Of course we will. I like the idea of Samson at the well-head. . . . But, I say, Reverend Sir! . . ."

"What's the question?"

"How about the little wench? Samson's little wench."

"I told you. She's getting on capitally . . ."

"That's just what I mean. What business has a little wench to be getting on capitally? Has she been ill?"

"I should hardly put it that way. No—I think I may say she hasn't exactly. But this chest-delicacy made the womankind and the doctor a little uneasy. On the whole we thought it best to send her down to Chalk Cliff to get a good dose of sea air. It appears to be setting her up."

Challis glanced shrewdly at the Rector's face of discomfort. "Sea air's the thing," he said. "Does wonders!" And both felt very contented with the effect of imaginary sea air on imaginary human lungs.

That remark we made, a page ago, about the way one uses up one's material for talk so heedlessly, was made with a reservation. It should only be applied to *causerics,* not to serious debate of deep interest. There are two distinct strata of conversation with all people; the things that interest us generally are the top stratum; those that touch us are the second. Go a little deeper, and you will reach those that put us on the rack. Only, when it comes to that, is it conversation any longer? What is it?

These two men had plenty to talk about in the top stratum—enough to fill the day out had they chosen. But the Rector had no intention of leaving the second untouched, and no fear of digging down to the third, if need were. There was, however, no need

for either yet awhile. Both might remain in abeyance, under a silent pact, as long, at least, as the sun shone. Serious talk-time comes with lamps and candles. Once in the day Challis was conscious of the thinness of the crust of the second stratum. On their way to visit Jim's well-head he asked his companion whereabouts it was. "Half-way between the village and the Hall," was the reply—"perhaps rather nearer the Hall than the village. Oh yes—certainly nearer!" Challis asked—to make talk, for he knew the answer to his question—whether the family were there now. "Miss Arkroyd isn't," said the Rector.

"I have never seen blind Samson, you know," said Challis. "Only the little cuss." The recollection of Lizarann brought a twinkle to his face. To his companion's, none. Who, however, says gravely: "She was a dear, amusing little thing."

Blind Samson is on duty. The blaze of a sun, low enough to make long shadows, shows the wreck of a man, his face bronzed now by its glare through a hot summer and the congenial effort of the well-handle. A little way off you would not know the eyes saw nothing, but for their never flinching from the sunlight that strikes full upon them. Going nearer, you would know them for dead. So too, if his legs were hidden as he leans on the bearing-post, puffing placidly at his pipe, you would judge him a fine sample and a strong, well cast indeed for the part of Samson.

"Jim's a popular chap in these parts," says the Rector as they draw near. "Our barber in the village tells me he always looks forward to Mr. Coupland's weekly visit. Every Saturday Jim goes to him—in spite of a fiction he indulges in that he can shave himself—to be ready for church on Sunday."

"I thought you said the other day—I mean last April—that he was a worse heathen than myself?"

"So he is. But he has made a compromise with his Maker—whom he disapproves of strongly otherwise—on the score of music. He is a tremendous addition to the village choir. I fancy he was always musical, but his blindness has developed the faculty."

"Well—it must be water in the desert for poor Jim. Here we are, I suppose?"

A dog came down the path of worn bricks, set on edge, that leads to the well. He is Jim's dog, and very important, for he conducts Jim to the well and back daily, in Lizarann's absence. But the actual importance of this dog, though great, is as nothing compared to his conviction of it. This, if it does not amount to a belief that he turns the well-handle, lays claim to reserved powers of veto over, or permission conceded to, Jim's interference with

the water-supply. He smells every applicant for water carefully, to see that all is right, and he glances into every bucket before it leaves the well-head, and occasionally tastes the contents, as though in search of microbes. In his opinion it is entirely owing to him that the well has not been poisoned by bicyclists, who are afraid to stop and effect their wicked purposes because of the promptitude with which he runs out and barks at them. He appears to sanction Challis and the Rector, and to explain them, obligingly, to his principal—or perhaps we should say employee.

"I caught the sound of ye, coming down the road, master," says Jim. "You're a glad hearing to a man, a marning like this. A sight for sore eyes, as the saying is." Which was said with such a serene, unconscious confidence that it almost imposed on his hearers. Jim didn't let the Rector's hand go at once. "Nothing further, I lay?" said he anxiously.

"Not since yesterday, Jim. I thought the letter a good one. I've brought it back in my pocket. . . . We're talking about his little girl, Challis, down at Chalk Cliff. . . . This is Sir Alfred Challis, Jim, a friend of Lizarann's."

Jim seemed puzzled for a few seconds, perhaps not recalling the name in its present form; then experienced illumination. "Ay, sure, sir! . . . I lost my bearings for the moment. . . . The little lassie, she's talked of you many's the time. But that'll be a while back?"

"Over a twelvemonth, Jim," says Challis, and his inner soul adds, "And what a twelvemonth!" But he has to talk about the child. "I'm sorry she's not here, Jim," he says, and means it. "We made great friends, your little lassie and I did. She said she liked me better than she did her aunt."

Jim laughed delightedly. "There never was love lost between the lass and her Aunt Priscilla. They weren't cut out for berthmates." Nevertheless, he didn't want to leave his sister quite out in the cold. "Priscilla's a good-hearted woman, ye know, too, when all's told. But she's had some bad times . . . a bad husband. . . ." He hesitated on his condemnation, and went for palliation instead. "Well!—perhaps that's too hard a word. Poor Bob Steptoe!—he'd have made a better end but for his drawback. He took a good rating as a cobbler." Jim paused, perplexed by some reminiscence. "I don't hear much nowadays of my sister Priscilla; not since I come down here. I make out she's in service with a lady at Wimbledon." The fact is, Jim and Aunt Stingy were drifting apart by tacit consent.

Challis ought to have been able to contrive a reminder that Aunt

Stingy was his cook. He began by saying: "Of course—with my wife. She's our cook at the Hermitage." That wouldn't do, clearly. Try again! "She's our cook at home." He wasn't at all sure this wasn't worse. He decided on, "She cooks for me, you know, when I'm in London," but threw up entrenchments against possible surprises by changing the subject. "So your little maid's gone to the seaside?"

Jim forgot Aunt Stingy with avidity. "Ah! for sure she has!" said he. "My little lass! But she's coming back early next month. Ask the master!"

"Early next month, Jim. That's the fixture." Is there a trace of cheerful reassurance in the Rector's voice? Yes—just enough to produce misgiving in Jim. It has to be stifled in its birth. Jim treads bravely over the cinder-traps—the fires smouldering underground. "Ye see, gentlemen," he says, "it's this way: If my lassie comes back afore September, there'll maybe be a spell of sunshiny weather fit for a lassie to see her Daddy a mile down the road. Belike, too, stop a little to bear him company, in the best o' the day. Many a September month have I known, early morning apart, to compare with the rarest days of the summer."

"They call it a summer, you know, Jim. St. Augustin's summer." So says Challis; and he is ready to supply any climatic record to please Jim. "Sometimes the thermometer has been known to stand at ninety in the shade."

Jim is greatly impressed, and very happy over this. He sees before him, in imagination, a fortnight or three weeks of matchless weather, with Lizarann beside him. His soul laughs; indeed, his lungs join chorus. "What did the doctor say again, master?" says he.

But Athelstan's face is one of concern. The doctor's report had been, alas! that the effect of the sea air would very likely begin to tell on the patient when she got back. She would, no doubt, be better when she got back to her father, about whom she was fidgety. This doctor kindly vouched for the same thing having happened several times in like cases.

Challis watched his friend as he made out the best tale he could. Do you remember Challis's first appearance in this story, and how we spoke of him as perceptive? He was that, and all sorts of little intimations constantly reached him, by mysterious telegraphies, of concurrent events—things many would miss altogether. No wonder he read between the lines of Athelstan Taylor's version of the doctor's report! No wonder!—for any but a blind man would have detected in the Rector's serious face how

little he believed the well-worn forms of speech folk use to keep the hearts of others alive, in case—just this one time—a real change for the better should come, or the last new remedy should fulfil the promises of the ream of testimonials it was wrapped in when we bought it. But the Rector threw as much hope as he dared into his telling, and did well, on the whole. And Jim was satisfied for now.

A little later, when the two were starting to go back to the Rectory by a roundabout way, having left Jim attending to the demands for water of an influx of applicants, Athelstan Taylor said to Challis: "I felt quite ashamed of myself just now. . . . What for? Why, for talking all that stuff to Jim about poor little Lizarann! But what can one do? There's nothing to be gained by plunging the poor fellow in despair, as long as any hope remains of her outgrowing it."

"You mean there is some hope, then?"

"Some." That was all the Rector said.

"I see. But is it to be a long job?"

"Probably not—probably not. But she may live for some little time yet—with care. I don't know how much Jim knows or suspects."

"Where is she now actually?"

"It's called the Browne Convalescent Home, at Chalk Cliff, in Kent. Sidrophel—I should say Pordage—said he saw no object in sending her to a mild lowering place at this time of year. What she wanted was the sea-air, and he is very much in love with Chalk Cliff. Well!—one smells the seaweed there."

"It's the iodine, I suppose." Challis's mind travelled to his own children, who were, he hoped, soaking in the iodine, wallowing in the sand, wading in the shallows, and not keeping their things out of the water. Should he ever see Mumps and Chobbles again? Possibly. Suppose he were to meet them years hence, lengthened and completed, at Girton, perhaps—even engaged; who can tell?—would they know him again? His thoughts rushed swiftly, *more suo*, to the construction of all sorts and conditions of social horrors, beginning with an improbable evening party with Chobbles in the foreground, and her married sister, and a fiendish necessity for explaining to a dazzling lady who was charmed with both of them, that they were his children by his former marriage—the very identical Mumps and Chobbles he had so often told her about! But that dream was soon sent packing, although the dazzling lady said, with a pleasant, graceful contempt for all correlatives of Grundy: "You *must* come and see me, you two dear

girls! Do let's be German, and take no notice of things. Never mind the *orkwidities,* as my husband calls them." A worse phantasm followed. Two girls in mourning beside a grave, and "Marianne, daughter of James and Sarah Craik," on the headstone. So vivid was the impression that the words were on his lips: "Mumps and Chobbles, don't you know me?" He shook it off, denouncing its intrinsic absurdity, even while he admitted he had no justification for doing so. Marianne would die, and so would he, and neither would be beside the other when the hour came.

"Am I going too quick for you?" said the Rector. He had broken into his tremendous stride, as he was always apt to do when not checked. Challis admitted his limitations, and suggested that they might go easily up this hill. As this hill was a short-cut across a curve of the road, and the path over it was zigzagged, and landslipped, and fern-grown, besides seeming to consist almost entirely of rabbit-holes, it was not a hill to go up easily, in any literal sense. But Challis had only intended to suggest moderation. He gave his whole soul to avoiding burrows, and reached solid ground alive. As he approached the top, alongside of his companion, he was aware of a huge dog, blue-black against the sky, on the ridge in front of them. Saladin appeared to be waiting for them, and to have time on his hands. Whistled to, he condescended to trot towards them, the sooner to meet. Interrogated as to his reasons for being there by himself, he kept silence, but smelt his questioners.

Perhaps he wasn't by himself. Surmise inclined to the supposition that the carriage was in the neighbourhood; probably Lady Arkroyd, driving back from Thanes, said the Rector. But attentive listening established carriage-wheels on the road from Furnival—the opposite direction.

"It's Miss Arkroyd coming from the station. She was coming by the two-forty from Euston." So spoke Challis.

The Rector looked full at him. "How did you know?" said he. He seemed a good deal surprised.

"Because she told me," said Challis. He in his turn seemed surprised at the surprise of the other, and interrogation remained on the face of both. Saladin seemed able to wait.

After a moment the Rector said suddenly: "Because she's been away at her sister's—Brayle Court, you know—the Felixthorpes'."

"Yes; why not? She told me three weeks ago she was coming to-day. She drove to Bletchley from Brayle."

Athelstan Taylor's face was a funny mixture of perplexity and

mild reproach, not without confidence in his companion. "But why didn't you say so?" said he.

"You mean when you mentioned her just now—just before we came to Jim? Well!—because I didn't want to spoil our walk. . . . There's the carriage!"

The carriage was there, in the road some distance below, and was whistling for Saladin. He appeared to accept the whistle as a courtesy on its part, intended to keep him *au fait* of its movements and whereabouts. Otherwise he had a short time at his disposal, and would pass it in giving sanction and encouragement to his present companions. The horses' hoofs and the whistle passed and grew less in the distance, but Saladin remained undisturbed and statuesque.

"No," said Challis; "I didn't want to spoil our walk. Indeed, I'm in two minds if I shouldn't do better to say nothing at all about it."

"About what?"

"Well!—that's just the point. However, as I've leaked out this much, I suppose I may as well tell. About myself and Judith Arkroyd."

"Oh dear!" said the Rector, "I had been supposing—I mean I had been beginning to hope—that was all at an end. . . ."

Saladin had no more time to spare for nonsense of this sort. He went with a rush—the rush of a sudden whirlwind—crashing through mere valueless briar and fern like gossamer; but suggesting that it was for *their* sakes, not his, that he steered clear of timber-trees. The carriage, still audible, became aware of him, and stopped whistling.

"I want to tell you all about it on my own behalf. And I suspect Judith will on hers." So Challis spoke, when the lull came. He then went on to tell all that this story has told, and it may be more. And the narrative lasted all the way back to the Rectory.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE RECTOR'S OPINION, AND WHY IT CARRIED NO WEIGHT. OF THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER, AND WHY CHALLIS DOUBTED IT. YET THE RECTOR TOLERATED HIS IMPIETY

THE Rector sat in his usual chair in the library smoking his usual after-dinner pipe, his only concession to tobacco. It served a turn now—harmonized his life with that of his friend, who, of course, sat on the other side of the rug, that both might be conscious of an empty grate. One pays this tribute in the summer, to the comfort the warmth would have been had it been winter. Or is it a survival of some ancestral fire-worship?

It was Challis's second pipe in the day that he was lighting, but his fourth smoke. He looked as though something narcotic were wanting, if he were to sleep in the night ahead of him. His forehead throbbed, the Rector felt convinced. Else why did that restless, nervous hand skim it over, from side to side, then press the closed eyelids below as though to squeeze a pain out?

He had told the whole of his story, ending it up during dinner, and doing poor justice to the efforts of the Rectory cook. Athelstan Taylor had listened nearly in silence, not saying how much he had already heard, or had guessed, of the way things had gone since his attempted intercession with Mrs. Challis. Challis's absences from England, and the chance that their London visits never coincided, had kept them apart until his visit to London three months since. On that occasion they did little more than arrange that Challis should visit the Rectory "as soon as he could get away." And he couldn't—or at least didn't—"get away" till August. But nothing that he had told his friend had occasioned the latter the least surprise.

"Well!—that's all," said he, as he lighted his pipe.

The Rector's face was all strength and pity as he sat looking at his storm-tossed friend. He remained silent awhile over it. Challis could not hurry him to speech. However, there was the whole evening ahead.

At last he spoke. "That's quite all, is it? Very good. Now, I can't and won't recommend any course to you, because, my dear man, you are under an hallucination, and you wouldn't pay the

slightest attention to anything I suggested. But I'll tell you, if you like, what I shall say to Judith Arkroyd if she comes to me for advice."

"What?"

"I shall say, 'Don't!'"

"Don't go on with it, that is?"

"Exactly. I shan't mince matters. I shall tell the girl flatly that I think she's doing wrong. . . ."

"But why—but why? Surely if *she* is, I am. Or more so! Far more so!"

"Do you suppose I regard you as a responsible agent?"

"I don't think you do. But I am one, for all that. What shall you say to Judith?"

"That I *do* regard her as a responsible agent. I shall entreat her not to consent to such a mad scheme. I shall try to make her see the folly of acting under panic in a matter of such vital importance. I shall tell her plainly, as I told you an hour ago, that I think your wife's action has been justifiable, although it has been violent and exaggerated. I admit that, you know. . . ."

"And *I* think that it has been violent and exaggerated, but admit that it has not been altogether unjustifiable. Isn't that the difference between us, Rector?"

"Precisely. Well!—I shall say so to Judith. And I shall put it this way to her. 'If before God and your conscience you can disclaim all share in what has come about, if you have never by word or look been guilty of an attempt to make this man's plighted faith to his wife a wavering one, then it may be you may marry him and not live to repent it. But if it is otherwise, you may be sowing by such a marriage the seeds of a remorse that may last you a life-time.' . . ."

Challis interrupted him. "Judith is absolutely unconscious . . ." he began.

"Exactly, exactly, exactly!" said the Rector, nodding in a comfortable, we-understand-all-that sort of way. "But, about this sort of thing, sometimes a young lady's standard of unconsciousness is low. You must excuse me if I try—it's a toss-up if I succeed—to make her probe her soul to its lowest depths."

"My dear Yorick!—excuse my boning Miss Fossett's name again; but it does suit you so exactly—My dear Yorick, whatever you do or say will be right—*shall* be right. That's the rule of the game. All I say is, don't make Judith imagine herself to have been guilty of a treacherous scheme that never entered her mind. She assures me . . ." He hesitated.

"Yes!" from the Rector.

"Well!—she assures me that until that unfortunate—or mind you!—it may prove fortunate—failure in self-restraint . . . suppose we call it! . . ."

"Call it anything you like, as long as you feel properly ashamed of it."

Challis accepted the rule of the game he had just laid down loyally, and continued, "Until that moment she had not the slightest idea that I had ever entertained . . ." Again a hesitation.

"Precisely!" said the Rector. Both went as near a laugh as the contexts permitted, and then Challis said, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "Well!—it's no use talking." But his friend meant to say more. "It may be no use," said he. "But I've picked up—in the pulpit, I suppose—the old vice of the sermon-monger, and I like to have my say out. . . ."

"I didn't mean *you* were to stop," interjected Challis.

"Then I shall go on, as per contract." He appeared to put semi-levities aside with the finished pipe he laid down, and stood facing Challis as he sat. Standing so, he looked so much the build of a soldier that his cloth, so obnoxious to Challis, almost became regimentals. He resumed, very earnestly, "I shall say this, too, to Judith—no!—don't be afraid I shall be cruel to her. Why!—haven't I known her since she was a little tot, and sat on my knee? . . . I shall tell her that to me marriage is a sacrament just as solemn as any mutual undertaking where each party is in earnest and believes in the earnestness of the other . . . yes!—even as contracts about darling money—and that no antecedent relation of the couple can flaw the pledge once given . . . yes!—I am prepared to go any length; but never mind that now. . . . And I shall tell her this:—that however obstinate and wrong-headed your wife's conduct may have been, just in so far as it has been provoked by any misconduct of yours or hers—just so far are you morally guilty in contemplating any step which will make the position irretrievable."

Challis broke into his momentary pause. "Do you really mean, soberly and seriously, that you think Marianne's dragging the children away—my Chobbles was like your Joan, you know, Yorick!—do you think her catching at a legal pretext to deprive me of them has not given me a free hand? What right has Marianne to condemn me to a loveless and lonely life . . .?"

"Stop, Challis—stop! Stop on the legal pretext! At what age of the world has man, the strong, scrupled to catch at legal pretexts to secure the betrayal and confusion of woman, the weak?

Legal pretexts, mind you, whose iniquity stinks in every legal phrase that relates to her, in every statute that he has framed and she has had no hand in! How many legal pretexts are there in the whole of them that a woman can catch at to her own advantage? One turns up now and again, in a rare conjunction of circumstances, and hey presto!—we are all on the alert to blame the woman who does it."

"You're quite right," said Challis ruefully. "It's melancholy to think how keenly alive one is to other folks' sinfulness when one suffers by it personally; loses one's Chobbles, for instance. I was fond of the young person, you see, Yorick! Besides, there's Mumps. And even Bob she contrives to stint me of. Either that, or the boy drifts away from his sisters."

"You should have thought of all that when you . . ."

"Made a fool of myself?"

"Quite so. By-the-bye, Challis, have you asked yourself—supposing that you ratify this folly of yours, as I understand you propose to do—what you mean to tell Bob to account for the new order of things?"

"Yes, frequently."

"And have you answered the question?"

"No, I have not."

"Do you see any prospect of answering it?"

"None whatever!"

"Very well, Challis! Now listen. It appears to me that you are going to take a step you are this much ashamed of, that you cannot look your own son in the face about it. And you are doing this confessedly in case the passing of an Act of Parliament should make that step impossible at a future time. You know perfectly well that—Judith apart—you would welcome that Act of Parliament, because it would give you back your children, and at least pave the way to a reconciliation with their mother. . . . Yes, it would! The 'living in Sin' twaddle would die a natural death before an Act of Parliament; your excellent mother-in-law's teeth would be drawn, and your wife would come to her senses as soon as the two little girls were delivered at Wimbledon by a judicial order. Once you two were face to face—just think of it!—do you suppose old times wouldn't come to the rescue?"

The Rector was hitting hard. He could see it in the compressed lips, the nostril and eyelid and brow that would not be still, in the face that was hard to control at the best of times. Why could he not keep to his artillery? Why send his troops into the enemy's country, bristling with ambuscades? Why bring Judith's image

back, when all the strength of his case lay in revival of the days gone by?

But he did, possibly because he could not conceive of a passion for one woman dwelling in the same heart with an affection for another. He could not measure the force of the personal factor in Judith. He had never been under fire.

"And see," he went on injudiciously—"see what it is you look to gain when you have cut yourself finally adrift from almost everything that has been precious to you in the past. What are the chances of happiness for a couple so assorted? Think of your difference of age! . . . well!—perhaps that's the least important point . . . think of the difference in the habits of a life-time, of the sort of life Judith has been accustomed to, of the way her pride may suffer . . . and not only hers—yours too—yours too, my dear Challis, in a thousand ways! Consider this too; what right have you to take for granted that she will ever be forgiven by her family? You say they are now at daggers drawn. What claim have you to ask such a sacrifice of her as the surrender of her relations with her parents and all the associations of her childhood? Think of it!"

A moment after he perceived he had pushed his argument too far. Challis said firmly, "I accept Judith's readiness to make this sacrifice as a sure proof of her feelings towards myself. I see in it a guarantee of a happiness far beyond my deserts. It is *because* she is ready to give up so much for me and risk her whole life in my keeping that I am rushing the position. I cannot have her think hereafter that our union was made impossible by my remissness—by my *fainéantise*—at a critical time."

The Rector walked uneasily about the room. "Oh dear," said he, "I wish to Heaven that Bill would get itself brought into the Lords and rejected, *tout à l'improviste,* before you could arrange this madness. Then you would have a cool twelvemonth to think it over in. And perhaps you would both come to your senses."

"And perhaps—*d'autant plus à l'improviste*—that Bill *would* pass the Lords and become law. How should I seem then to the girl who is ready to throw all away for me now? Do you conceive that I should be able to console myself for the wrong I had done by dragging back to my home a wife whose jealousy . . . I must call it so—poor Polly Anne! . . ."

"What else can you call it?"

"There's no other word in the dictionary. What was I saying?. . . oh, a wife whose jealousy would by that time have

every justification. Where would the happiness be in all that, and for whom?"

"In no case can you hope for an immediate reconstitution of your old home life. You, Challis—excuse me—have stirred up too much mud for the pool to become clear in a moment. But remember Disraeli's phrase—the 'magic of patience.'"

"A good phrase, a very good phrase! I am game for any amount of Hope, dear Yorick—hypothetical Hope, of a state of things that will never come about! If it did, *I* might get some sort of consolation out of it. What would Judith?"

The Rector was handicapped by his disbelief in Judith, whom he did not credit with overmuch heart; certainly not with one that would break on slight provocation. He could not say anything of this to this passionate fool of a man, over head and ears in love. Or he might have replied, "Don't you fret about Judith. *She'll* be all right enough." As it was, he could only keep closed lips, and pace about the room. Challis continued:

"And, after all, we are leaving the most probable possibility of the lot quite out in the cold. Suppose the mad scheme—Judith's marriage with me—does *not* come off, and the Bill passes. Suppose that I am inconsequent enough to jump at the new-fledged legal powers of depriving Marianne of her children, after damning her uphill and down for doing the very same thing herself; suppose me with my family back on the hearth—crying and frightened probably—and never a mother to see to them! Suppose, in fact, that Marianne stands to her guns! How then?"

"Other men have been in the same position before now." Perhaps the speaker was thinking of himself.

"Can you name a case in which no substitute for the mother existed, and the father was not at liberty to provide one? Please exclude salaried employees from the answer."

"Oh, I wasn't going to go that length. Heaven forbid!"

"You must observe," Challis continued, "that divorce *a vinculo* is only available if my wife arranges about the co-respondent. *I* can't!" He added in a voice that showed how strangely racked his feelings were, "Poor Polly Anne!—she wouldn't the least know how to set about it."

"I'm *horribly* sorry for you, Challis," said the Rector. "I am indeed! I would go the length of wishing that bigamy could be sanctioned, in certain cases, only that you are quite the wrong man for it. You wouldn't enjoy it."

"Have I not a foretaste of its horrors?" said Challis. "You see, Yorick dear, when Love comes in at the door, Patriar-

chal ideas fly out at the window. Jacob was a cucumber. I'm not!"

"Well!—Jacob must have loved Rachel, after a fashion. Seven years! . . . consider! . . ."

"Oughtn't it to be read 'weeks,' perhaps? Criticism is very accommodating about the seven days of Creation. Make it weeks." The conversation became irrelevant.

But after a good deal more talk of the same sort, an hour later, Challis said, "You're not a consistent Rector, do you know! You said when we began that you couldn't and wouldn't advise me. And you have substantially advised me to tell Judith to-morrow that we must leave the forelock of opportunity alone, and just take our chance of a permanent veto on matrimony, if that Bill goes through the Lords."

"Well!—yes! At least, it comes to the same thing. It has leaked out in conversation what I should have said to you if I had thought you would take my advice. . . ."

"Which would have been . . .?"

"Which would have been, 'On no account take an irrevocable step under pressure.' Believe me, Challis, if you do this thing, and this Bill never becomes law at all, and then you live to repent of the knot you have tied indissolubly, the thought hereafter that you gave way to a needless panic will make remorse tenfold more bitter."

"Are not you, when you say that, allowing a disbelief in the Bill's passing to influence you?"

"I may be, a little. But not nearly so much as I am by a belief I must try to explain to you . . . well!—it's none so easy. But I thought I had succeeded in explaining it to myself too." He paused a few seconds, then got clearer. "It's something like this. I can't conceive that any retrospective clause of the Act could declare valid a marriage the illegitimacy of which the parties themselves had acknowledged during the period of its legal invalidity. Do you see? . . . You would very likely word it more clearly than I can."

"No—that's as clear as daylight. But I am not prepared to acknowledge the illegitimacy of my marriage with Marianne."

"How can you act upon it, to the extent of marrying another woman, without acknowledging it?"

"If I were not under compulsion to acknowledge it, should I ever have thought of marrying the other woman? I plead coercion. Marianne dissolved our marriage. I had no hand in it."

"Coercion or no," said the Rector, "it comes to the same thing. No retrospective clause could declare valid a marriage that had been voided by one of the parties yielding to a coercion quite within the rights of the other to impose. Not that I'm sure there isn't a sort of general legal usage, that no one can claim legal advantage from the illegality of his own action."

"I see," said Challis. "Heads, deceased sister's husband wins. Tails, deceased wife's sister loses! But how would such an interpretation of retrospective action affect me and Judith?"

"Why, clearly! If the Bill passed ever so, your marriage with Marianne would remain void. It would class with any other contract, illegal at the time, whose illegality had been subsequently acknowledged and acted on. I heard once of a curious case in point. Two young people had got married, knowing nothing of a consanguinity between them, owing to an old family quarrel. The girl was really a very much junior aunt of the young man; their respective mothers, daughters of the same father, having been born forty years apart. Of course, the children of this atrocious marriage were illegitimate."

"Did they part when they found it out?"

"Oh dear no! They brazened it out—said the meaning of the term 'aunt' was clear. Aunts had fronts, and so forth. The gentleman calls his wife aunty to this day, I believe. Perhaps you've seen the people? They've a large property in the South Riding of Yorkshire."

But Challis hadn't, and didn't know their name when mentioned. He seemed more interested in his own affairs. "If I understand you," said he, "your advice is—not to marry, in view of the possibility of this new enactment not acting retrospectively in cases of couples disunited by mutual consent, at a time when law held that no union existed. Let's pretend my consent was given, this time, for argument's sake."

"You have stated the case admirably. That is my advice. Wait!"

"You have a beautiful confidence, Yorick, in Acts of Parliament—before they are made! Would it be reinforced or weakened, I wonder, by a perusal of the Statutes at Large? Doesn't an element of hopefulness come in?"

"Hm—well—perhaps! That's my advice, anyhow. And that's the advice I shall give to Judith Arkroyd, if she comes to consult me. I shan't volunteer anything."

"I wish I could think as you do—about the effect of the Act, I mean." Challis's manner was to the last degree fitful and un-

easy. "I mean I wish I could be sure it would leave the question open."

The Rector, returning to his friend's side after one of his walks about the room, laid his strong hand on his shoulder, and the sense of its strength was welcome. "Challis, Challis!" said he, earnestly, "can you not read in your own words how well you know that you are acting under panic? Ask your heart—ask your conscience—if a wish for an extension of time would be possible in a mind really made up—a mind really believing such a step as you propose to take a right and honourable one! Confess that the reason you would be glad of a respite is that you are none so sure, after all, that what you do is the wisest course for either yourself or your wife; or, for that matter, for Judith."

Challis seemed for a moment puzzled about his meaning. Then he said, "Do you mean that you doubt the reality of my—of my love for Judith?" He seemed half ashamed of it, too!

"I mean that I think you are besotted about her—bewitched by her woman's beauty—the slave of an inclination you may live to repent one day in sackcloth and ashes. Well!—one can understand it all, down to the ground. You are not the first . . ."

Challis flushed a little angrily, and began, "Do you mean that Judith is . . ." He hesitated.

The Rector caught his meaning, and interrupted him. "A flirt?" said he. "No—I didn't mean that; though, mind you, I can't give the young lady complete absolution on that score. What I meant was that mighty few men in the world get through life without knowing all about this sort of thing from experience. Perhaps your catching the fever so late in life, after two marriages, makes the case exceptional. However, as I told you, I don't regard you as a rational being at present; so I won't preach."

He had not removed his hand from Challis's shoulder, and the action of the latter as he turned away and, crossing to the window, looked out at the starlit night, had its shade of protest in it, though it could not be said that he had exactly shaken the hand off.

Athelstan Taylor waited a moment, looking half sorry, half amused, but not the least disposed to weaken his words. Then he followed his friend to where he stood looking out, and said as he replaced his hand—only that this time he laid his arm fully across the shoulder—"Remember the compact, my good man, remember the compact! I'm to say what I like."

"You are to say what you like, dear Yorick, and soften nothing.

You think me a fool, and I am one. But the fact that my folly is carried *nem. con.* won't get me out of the difficulty it has got me into. Blame it as you will—but your blame won't answer the question I ask myself every hour of the day: what sort of value will Judith set on the love of a man who hung fire about carrying out his pledges till it was too late, on the miserable plea that it was ten chances to one another twelvemonth of vacillation might be possible? What right has any man to put expediencies, calculations of chance, the unforeseen outcomes of this or that, against the well-being of the woman he is all the while coolly asking to give herself away to him? No, Yorick, I haven't got it in me to go and say to Judith, 'I love you; it is true. But if I wed you now, while we know we are free to wed, and then some time repentance comes, it will be a bitter thought to me that—had I waited' . . . et cetera—don't you see?"

"My dear Challis, I am no match for the eloquence of a gifted author who is pleading the cause of his own inclinations. . . ."

"Even when he ends up with 'et cetera'?"

"Even then. But remember this—that what I am saying to you now is scarcely meant as urging definite action upon yourself. It may have seemed so in form, but my actual meaning has been to show the sort of advice I shall give Judith if I have the good fortune to speak with her in time; if, that is, she gives me the right to speak by speaking first herself. I shall do the same with the Bart. and her ladyship. If they don't take me into their confidence, I shall presume they don't want me to share it."

"Talk to Judith by all means. But Judith won't counsel delay—I feel sure of it—if she supposes that I shall think she has done so for my sake. She knows perfectly well that the readier she is to sacrifice herself for me, the keener I shall be to confiscate the knife. If she were to plead against this hasty action that she herself felt insecure in it—would rather run the risks, on the chances—that would be quite another matter. But she won't do that."

"If it comes to cross-fires of reciprocal misgivings and misunderstandings—or understandings, if you like—between you and Judith Arkroyd, I give up, and there's an end on't!" The Rector's laugh made the atmosphere happier. "But I'm afraid my general conclusion is that man is never at a loss for good reasons for doing anything he wants to do, especially when it involves a lady."

"You may be right. But it's a horrible perplexity."

Athelstan Taylor was lighting candles for bed. For it was past midnight. As he took Challis's hand to say good-night, he said to

him: "We superstitious, old-world, out-of-date folk, priests and the like, are in the habit of praying to be guided right in horrible perplexities. Is it any use . . . ?"

"Well!—plenty of use as far as my good-will to feel with you is concerned? But to my inner vision, none! To my thought, Omnipotence is already doing everything—everything everywhere—and I don't see how I could put up a prayer to the Top Bloke . . . pardon my using an expression you object to . . ."

"Not at all. Go on."

". . . A prayer to guide me right without appearing to suggest either that He was already guiding me wrong, or that the Bottom Bloke—no one can possibly object to that—had usurped his functions."

Strange to say, the Rector seemed not the least shocked. On the contrary, he laughed. "All right, old chap," said he. "You leave yourself in the hands of the Top Bloke. He'll see to it all right. Good-night!" But he looked back as he opened his bedroom door to say, "Keep the gas on till you have the electric light."

CHAPTER XLV

HOW CHALLIS AND JUDITH MET AGAIN AT TROUT BEND, AND TALKED IT OVER. HOW SHE CAME OFF, FEELING SECURE, AND OF THE AGREEMENT THAT WAS MADE BY A CENTENARIAN WHO HAD MANY INVENTIONS.

It was early morning at Trout Bend, and the man who sat on the moss-grown boulder and told this story told of—more than a year ago now—was turning over in his heart all that had come about in that short time, and trying to say to himself point-blank that it was no fault of his own. He succeeded in saying it—said it aloud in words, that there should be no doubt at all about it. He said it twice, in fact, and seemed in the end dissatisfied.

Every little incident of the day's life turned to throw doubt on the point. The discordant jay that shrilled in the thicket as good as cried out "Liar!" and flittered away disgusted. The squirrel that perched half-way up the beech-trunk had an air of shocked reproach in his very large and startled eye, and when he moved again seemed to want to get out of the way as soon as possible, and to mix with sincere Society again. The fish that leaped in the pool had come to the surface this time clearly, to say to Challis: "We have met before, and my life has not changed. Yours has, and you have only yourself to thank for it! Why need you leave your native waters uncompelled?"

Challis derided the suggestion his own mind had made. He had had to share in what followed: his smoke from those waters had been compulsory. Or, rather, was it not true that the waters had drained away from him, and left him to find another pool down-stream, or die unnourished on the dry sands? But it was a metaphor that rang false, and he dismissed it impatiently, the more so that some mental distortion, akin to the one he invented the strange name for, must needs intrude an unwarranted image of an angler with rod and line, and cause him to an indignant denial of that angler's identity. Whose fault soever it was, it was none of Judith's.

And as he thought this, there she was herself, crossing the little plank bridge where the starlet dropped the ring, and found it again so many years too late.

He was on his feet in a moment, and on his way to meet her. He had a double-barrelled kiss ready on his lips, supposing the coast clear at the moment of their meeting. Saladin, who was present, was in confidence, and didn't count. Botheration take that old woman gathering sticks!—did she matter?

Judith thought so, evidently, and payment had to wait. "Company!" said she. She was looking as beautiful as ever—more so! "She's a hundred and two, I believe," she added. "But one has to lay down a rule in these matters, and stick to it." She was referring to the old woman, who most likely neither saw nor heard, or if she did, only harked back to eighty years ago, and thought, "Why not?"

All Challis's cloud of doubt and self-reproach vanished as her consolatory hand lay in his arm. Something of her masterful nature was in the touch of it, communicable through nerve-currents. It reassured him, and he could respond to its pressure, old woman or no!

It was an arranged meeting: much taken for granted. Conversation to go on presently where our last meeting left it. Meanwhile, short recognitions of current event.

"When did you come?"

"The day before yesterday."

"The voice of gossip cannot say you followed me down here. Not that it would matter!"

"I fancy we are pretty transparent." Challis dismissed the matter as a slight interest only. "Are we peaceful at the Hall?"

"Oh—well! One short row—a very small one! It's rather unfortunate that some people who were expected have cried off. And another gang had just gone. So my dear parents . . . to whom I am really devoted; and they are so good and upright and that sort of thing . . . what was I saying about them?—oh yes!—my dear parents and I were alone. It was unlucky." Challis threw up his eyebrows very slightly, and made a barely audible note of interrogation through closed lips. She replied to it: "Yes—the usual sort of thing." And they walked on slowly arm in arm, not speaking.

Presently the lady resumed, seeming always the more talkative of the two: "Compulsory truce this evening, I suppose. Most likely Sibyl and Frank, who, I understand, is ridiculous about Sib. Besides, Mr. What's-his-name is coming . . . what *is* his name?" . . .

"Tell me who he is, and I'll see if I know."

"Oh dear!—man that talks metaphysics. . . ."

"Brownrigg?"

"Of course! Brownrigg. Well!—he's coming this afternoon, so we've only time for a very short allowance of Family Life. I suspect Brownrigg of having an Attraction down here, but I can't for the life of me find out who it is!"

"Attractions are feminine?"

"Always."

"Otherwise I should have thought it might be the Rector."

"The Reverend Athelstan—dear good man! Oh no—it's a lady! It always is. But did the Reverend speak of Broadribb—Brownrigg?"

"I've got an impression that he has been at the Rectory more than once—considerably more. Couldn't exactly say why?"

"There's nothing feminine there—at the Rectory."

Challis was beginning, "Oh yes!—there's . . ." when Judith's outburst of laughter cut him short.

"Dear Aunt Bessy! She's forty. . . . Oh yes, I know she's worthy!" She laughed more than need was; then recovered her gravity, and said, as though she feared her laughter might have grated on her companion: "Not to laugh at the good lady?—is that it? Very well." Judith's mockery for once seemed just short of charming to her lover, to whom it was usually one of her happiest contrasts to Marianne's unsympathetic reverence for so many things her husband's derision classed as beadledom. This time he would have preferred that the time-honoured practice of making game of old maidenhood should have been touched with a lighter hand. There was suggestion of a consciousness of this in Judith's next words: "It was your fault, you know, Titus, for hinting at Brownrigg. It was quite too funny."

Her fascination reasserted itself; indeed, its wavering had been of the slightest, and had not lasted long enough for acknowledgment. "I admit it was a laughable notion," said Challis. "However, I don't think an enchantress is necessary in this case. Athelstan Taylor would account for anything, and you know he is liberality itself towards all new ideas. He told me yesterday he thought Graubosch a most interesting personality."

"Did you—you say you had come yesterday?"

"No—the night before."

"You and the great Yorick—isn't that what his friend Miss Foster calls him?—haven't been talking of Graubosch all that time?"

"Fossett. Oh dear no! We have been talking chiefly of . . ." A pause. ". . . Well!—of *our* affairs."

"Meaning yours and mine. *Eh bien!*—and what says Sir Oracle? . . . No, no!—no irreverence, indeed! . . . oh no!—you *said* nothing. But you have such a mobile countenance." A shade of protest had been detectable, presumably, in Challis's face, and he had disclaimed it.

"Meaning your affairs and mine," said he, with only a pooh-pooh smile for the sub-colloquy. "Sir Oracle is in opposition."

"I knew he would be—dear good man! You'll tell me I'm sneering, I know—but I'm not—if I say . . ."

"What?"

"That his is such a beautiful unworldly character. I can tell you exactly what he said to you."

"Then, dearest, I needn't tell *you*. Fire away!"

"He said we must on no account take an irrevocable step in a hurry; and must trust to Providence to keep His eye on the Lords when the division comes, and make sure of a majority against the Bill."

"He said something not very unlike it. A good shot! But he never suggested that Providence was disposed to consider our interests. I must admit that I don't see why Providence should. My own attitude has hardly been conciliatory." Challis then went on to give a fairer version of what the Rector had said. As he spoke, a touch of scorn came on the beautiful face beside him, and grew and grew. And he fancied the pressure of the hand on his sleeve lightened.

"A thorough business man's view!" said Judith, when he stopped. "Scarcely so unworldly on the whole as our good Yorick generally is! I don't know, though, whether I ought to say that. Beautiful unworldly characters manage their affairs unselfishly only because . . ."

"Because they think Providence will act as their agent? Is that what you were going to say?"

"Well!—they always boast that it pays best in the long run. Anyhow, this clearly *was* the business view. To the business mind, with its faith in Law and Order and Representative Government and things, nothing can be clearer. You and Marianne have cried off a compact Law and Order condemned, while you still had a right to do so. Is it creditable that the New Act will tie you together again, willy-nilly?"

"Dearest!—try to see my difficulty. Don't think me cowardly or politic; only believe that it *is* a difficulty to me, and a serious one. Suppose us wedded—to-morrow—before the passing of the

Act, anyhow! Suppose that when it comes it legitimates retrospectively every marriage that was not acknowledged void by *both* parties while it was still an unlawful one!"

Judith withdrew her hand and looked away. "Have you not acknowledged the illegitimacy of yours?" she said coldly.

"In a sense I have." Challis was evidently flinching under his consciousness of his position.

"I do not like 'in a sense,' Titus. Is Marianne your wife or not?"

"Listen to me, dearest!" He would have replaced her hand in his arm, but she withstood his doing so, partly qualifying her resistance by a pretence of finding Saladin's whistle. He continued pleadingly: "Think what it would be for me if at some future time my two little girls were to suffer from a reproach their brother does not share, and charge me with giving my boy a better hold on the world than they could lay claim to. . . ."

"It was their reproach from the beginning. . . ."

"Yes—yes! But suppose this Act would, but for me, have conferred legitimacy retrospectively. . . ."

"How 'but for you'?"

"Why—clearly! It might include in its retrospective action only such marriages as were held valid by one or other party at the date of the passing of the Bill. Mumps and Chobbles might be legitimate or no, according to my attitude towards their mother about our separation. It seems to me that my having refused to acknowledge it might make all the difference. . . ." Challis paused awkwardly. For he had suddenly become aware that he was adducing reasons in plenty why he should not marry Judith at all. He had not meant his argument to go that length. He was only showing one form the Nemesis of Repentance might take in the event of the immediate passing of the Act. He was losing sight of the fact that if the Bill was thrown out, all his reasonings would apply just as much to a more leisurely union during the twelvemonth of respite.

The fact is he wanted to eat his cake and have it too—to get the advantage of the Act for his children and to avoid the guillotine himself. If he and Judith were not married in time, either their project would be made impossible, or at best the problem of justice or injustice to the children would stand over *sine die*, with all its present difficulties unsolved. If, on the other hand, they got married, the Act could only benefit his children by affirming his marriage with their mother a lawful one, and declaring Judith the second wife of a bigamist. Unless, indeed, a dexterous special

clause in it gave his rupture with Marianne the validity of a divorce. Not a very likely provision of legal ingenuity!

How little idea the old lady gathering sticks must have had of what the gentleman was talking—talking—talking about to the lady, whose undisturbed beauty seemed to make no response, or barely a word now and then! Her centenarian mind probably thought it was only the usual thing—the use of eighty odd years agone, when she first knew of it; and so till now, except folk were changed since then.

But the gentleman would have done well to say less. None of his earnestness, none of his perturbation—none of his Law, none of his Logic—made matters a bit better. In one way they made it worse. A sense of a painful contingency crept in that had hardly had sufficient consideration. How if in the labyrinth of possibilities that sheer Legalism can construct over the grave of Fair Play there was really hidden a possible indictment for bigamy? If Challis married Judith, his first wife being still alive, with the reservation that the latter wasn't his wife at all, how then? Could he even obtain a Special Licence at Doctors' Commons? He would have to declare that no legal impediment existed, and to satisfy the Archbishop of Canterbury that his reasons for wanting it were sound. Perhaps his Grace would be crusty, and refuse it, to spite him for marrying his Deceased Wife's Sister. However, the idea of a piqued Prelate hitting below the belt in this way relieved a growing tension, and brought a smile into the matter.

Challis was glad to shift away from a perplexity. After a pause of silence he said: "Do you remember how we walked here—more than a year ago—and you told me you had given up the idea of Estrild?"

Judith replaced the hand she had taken away. "Oh, so well!" said she. "I was so sorry. But it seems to me that if my dearly-beloved family are going to quarrel with me about my marriage, I deserve to play Estrild as a set-off. I shall think about it."

They came to the coppice-wood, and the half-shade of its light and shadow-chequered path was grateful; for the sun was mounting, and his heat beginning to tell. Saladin brushed roughly past them, to see—at a guess—that all the tree-stems were in order. Judith leaned a little more on the arm she held.

"Do you remember," said she, "how I called you Scroop, and how funny it made you look? Oh dear, how strange it does all seem!"

"I remember. And how I couldn't well call you Judith back. Would you have been offended?"

"Should I ever have been offended at anything you did, dear love?" Her hand was pressed between his arm and the other hand, that had come across to caress it.

The two of them had the little secluded path well to themselves; certainly Saladin didn't count. Now was the time for those kisses that had waited, and others, if need were. Challis, as he took Judith Arkroyd to his heart, felt his own past grow insignificant and dim. This was Life!

A phantasmagoric presentment of Great Coram Street and Wimbledon ran rapidly across the background of his mind. It was wonderful how many images he could feel the dimness of at once. Even so, the man who fell off the Monument marvelled at the incredible grasp of his powers of recollection, stung to a paroxysm of self-assertion. Why need so many things appeal to be forgotten; each one a bygone to itself; a faint spark, surely, but craving a separate extinction? He could feel—oh yes!—he could feel—that the nourishments of his life in those days were the merest refreshments. This was a banquet! He had attained to a satiety of Love. But why need those all-but-forgotten satisfactions of an unpretentious past thrust in their claims for recollection, each with its ill-timed reproach—"You did not despise us then!"?

There was no need for him to forget Kate. She was little more now than a bad misadventure of his early life. But there was many a little memory of Marianne in the earlier days that he would have to oust from the future unless his every hour was to be cross-textured with a weft of self-reproach. One little paltry thing went near to madden him with its importunity. Could he never touch the damask cheek of his enchantress of to-day without an intrusion into his mind of—Marianne's mole? Too ridiculous! —many will say. But there it was—the mole—back in this man's inner vision, to plague him with a reminder of that long-ago when he rallied its proprietor—Marianne was eighteen then—on its possession, but congratulated himself at the same time that it was not in the best place.

The story knows Challis too well to attempt to make the oddities of his mind plausible; it can only vouch for them. About minds it cannot vouch for, only speculation is open to it. It makes no pretence to know the inner heart of the beautiful woman whom he conceives to be so entirely his own. Whether what followed was, on her part, schemed to make all wavering on his impossible, and to bind that skein of his life fast in hers, or whether it was really what it seemed, she alone could tell. The story has no blame for

her, mind, if it was the former! She was within her rights—every woman's rights.

"Oh, Scroop—dear Titus—dear love! Let's have done with it and forget it all—all! It can never be, and we both know it." He had released her waist at some sound of footsteps approaching them as they stood in the pathway, but had kept her hands in his. Whoever it was was not in sight yet.

"'Odsbodikins, dearest, why—why—why? Why this of a sudden, out of the blue?"

"No—dearest—no!—it is truth. I *am* in earnest, indeed. It *cannot* be!" He would have taken her in his arms again, but her outstretched hand on his breast repelled him. "It must come to an end, and we know it. . . . No—do not! . . ."

"Then tell me, darling, quietly; why not—why now!"

"Listen, Scroop! I see it all so clearly. Yorick is right—good, clear-sighted man! If we get married in a mad hurry, under pressure, just to avoid this legislative Bill business. . . ."

"Cutting the ground from under our feet? Yes!"

"We may, as he says, live to repent it. After all, we are human!" The footsteps drew nearer—became a passing boy—caused a pause, and died away, leaving Judith to continue: "Suppose that all goes ill, and our fruits turn out Dead Sea apples, and so on! Suppose that you are disappointed in me! . . ."

"Never!"

"Foolish man, how can you tell? . . . However, this you *can* see: that if we fell out, you and I, anyhow, it would be a bitter thought to you that you had sacrificed your girls for my sake, as you would have done! You said so yourself, and I see it."

"The blame would not be mine." Challis got it said, but only just. He knew at least that he was dishonest in shirking his share of the blame. He went on to excuse, and, of course, accuse, himself. "What right had Marianne to imagine infidelities for me? . . . Yes!—I grant you 'infidelity' is a long word. But see what I mean, and think of it. Marianne had not a particle of evidence that . . . that you were to me . . . anything that any other lady is not. She was just as wrong in building false constructions on no grounds at all. . . ."

"On no grounds at all? Be fair to Marianne!"

"Well—on very little! . . . She was just as unjust in using what she *did* know to condemn me as if the things she did *not* know had never happened. The accident of the postscript might have happened a thousand times with any stranger. As to anything else that had passed between you and me, Marianne chose to take

action without a particle of proof, and she is to blame for the consequence. Yes, Judith; if Marianne hadn't acted as she did, I should have locked you out of my heart, and gone my way in silence."

"Would you?" asked Judith. It might have been reproach; but, then, it might have been mere questioning of his words. Challis gave himself the benefit of the doubt, and let Judith go on. "And if you had, do you think Marianne wouldn't have found you out? Oh, Scroop, Scroop, do you think women have no eyes?" She had a half-laugh for what she ended with: "You and your proofs and particles of evidence!"

He gave up the point. "Then let us whitewash Marianne," said he, "and make it all my fault. How much nearer are we—how much nearer to plain sailing? It seems to me I have to choose between a chance—only a chance, mind you!—of a legal sanction for the babies . . . and, really, dearest, it's not a thing I have ever fretted much about. . . ."

"But you ought to have. What's the other choice?"

". . . Between a chance of legitimacy for them and a certainty of not losing you. Can you wonder that I, thinking as I do of these legalities, should choose the last?"

"Listen, Scroop, and don't puzzle me with any more arguments. You make my head spin. I can only see the thing as I believe any woman would see it. This Parliamentary business may cut us asunder for ever; because you know if the Bill passes you won't be able to divorce Marianne. If I am to give you up, I want to do it here and now—to get it done and part at once, for good. . . ."

"I cannot give you up. . . ."

"And we cannot linger on through a life of miserable uncertainty. Fancy it!—next year the whole question over again—the same doubts—the same arguments! No—let us part and have done with it!"

"You do not mean what you say."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps I am only flinching like a coward from a life that might be unendurable. I would rather have my tooth out altogether than have it ache for a twelvemonth. So what can I say now? I am ready, if it can be arranged—that I don't know about. . . ."

He interrupted her. "And I am ready—more than ready!" And this time she did not repel him as he took her in his arms.

"But mind, dearest," said she, "if it were a certainty about the little girls, I should still say we ought to hesitate. But . . ."

"But it isn't certainty—even if the Bill passes ever so!" He

sealed the compact on her lips—on her cheeks. It was a *fait accompli*.

But nothing could keep all those memories of the past quite, quite in the background. They were all in evidence—dim evidence; yes!—even that confounded mole on Marianne's cheek.

The day had become quite hot when the centenarian faggot-binder saw the lady and the great dog say adieu to the gentleman in the light summer suit, and noted with some satisfaction that the adieu was a loving one. The gentleman seemed to watch the vanishing sunshade, in such request against the heat, across the little bridge and out of sight, to the last; then lit a cigar, and, passing near her, said "Good-morning," and unprovokedly gave her what she thought a welcome sixpence. That old lady and her great-great-grandchild called at the Hall next day to say the gentleman had given her half-a-sovereign by mistake, and, inquiry connecting the gentleman with Miss Arkroyd, procured the opinion of the latter that of course the gentleman meant old Mrs. Inderwick to have it. Who thereupon consigned it to a Georgian purse, and departed with benedictions.

But before Challis and Judith parted they had planned their campaign. And it only just came short of a prompt marriage by special licence. Concession was made on two points; one was regarded as almost out of court—namely, the chance that such a union could be regarded as bigamous. For was it conceivable that a law that quashed his paternity of his own children could indict him for his marriage with their mother? It seemed grotesque; but was worth a word, in view of the pranks of Themis.

The other point was this: So great a certainty might exist among political informants that the Bill would be thrown out in the Lords as to make the proposed step a ridiculously strained precaution, and needless under the circumstances. Unanimity of one or two strong Parliamentary authorities would be practical certainty, if they held to their opinions up to the brink of the division. If the political sky changed, causing them to waver, prompt action might be necessary.

In any case Challis was to procure a special licence, to be used or otherwise, at discretion, the date chosen being as late as he should think safe under the circumstances. Several minor difficulties had to be disposed of, but the only point necessary to the story is that Judith was to hold herself in readiness to become a bride at a short notice, and that Challis was to be answerable for time and place and the making of all the necessary arrangements.

Trousseaux, travelling gear, and the like, did not need consideration at present. For, in fact, both parties distinctly understood this marriage to be a mere precautionary measure, legally irrevocable, but otherwise *nil*. The bride would return to her paternal hearth, and might even make no allusion to the little event of the morning. The birds would not nest, but their names would be entered as man and wife on some parish register.

Challis said nothing to Athelstan Taylor of this scheme. He did not wish to put his friend to the necessity of either concealing it and assenting to it, or declaring it and fighting it. It seemed to him that the Rector would be compelled to an attitude of protest by his position, and that the most prudent as well as the fairest course for himself would be to hold his tongue.

So he finished his visit at the Rectory, and said farewell.

CHAPTER XLVI

HOW LIZARANN SAW THE SEA, AND A CHINESE LADY WROTE A BAD ACCOUNT OF HER TO HER FRIENDS. HOW IT NEVER REACHED JIM, AND MISS FOSSETT WAS WIRED FOR. HOW THE RECTOR HAD TO GO TO CHIPPING CHESTER.

THE tide was coming in at Chalk Cliff, and the Children, meaning thereby all those on the coast at the time, were little glowing spots of perfect unconcern; entire freedom from care, from memory of the past and apprehension for the future; things as unencumbered of responsibility and pain as tracts of smooth and furrowed sands, beneath a broiling July sun, with endless pools at choice awaiting the returning flood, and little boats to navigate them, and nets to capture prawns, and sand-castles and spades and wooden panniers you could pat the sand into, could make them. And the Children were paddling in the pools, and insuring swift and prosperous passages to the vessels under their control by pushing them—for there was never a breath of wind—and chasing elusive prawns and unknown specimens beneath the rocks, and putting their fingers in anemones, and molesting crabs, and not succeeding in removing limpets suddenly from their holdings, because the limpets were too sharp for them. Also they were hard at work, the more purposeful ones, erecting sand castles the very self-same shape as the limpets, and meeting in the middle, when they—the Children—burrowed from opposite sides to complete the said castles with four or even more tunnels, essential to perfect structure; and, ending with their country's flag, in tin, upon the summit, contentedly awaited the coming of the tide to wash it all away, and leave them new clean spaces for to-morrow.

Why is Lizarann content to watch the Children in the sun, to be dissociated from them as she lies upon the sand in the shade of that big white umbrella a guardian nurse manipulates in her interest? Why does she not seize the glorious opportunities of Life at its best; of Life those babies yonder, too happy now to measure their own happiness, will look back on one day not so very far hence as a sweet Elysium of the past, a heaven of unquestioning content the clouds of the years to come will never let them know again? Why does Lizarann—our Lizarann!—

prefer to lie still and converse with the good woman who has charge of her?

Well!—you see, she got tired with the journey yesterday. That's all. You'll see she'll pick up when she's been here a few days, and the sea air has had time to tell. Besides, it is notorious that its first effect on you is always enervating; and then you take quinine, and it gives you a headache.

Whatever the cause, Lizarann accepted the effect, and was content to watch the Children in the middle zone of best building sand, not too wet and not too dry, all working hard to be ready for the tide that was heralding its coming in a major key, as is the manner of tides that have died sadly away to sea, six hours since, in a minor. A false musical metaphor to him whose hearing goes no deeper than the surface of sound—true! But not to Lizarann, though she knew as little as we how to word the difference rightly between the joy of the sea returning and the lament of its departure. For this is written because Lizarann wanted to ask the lady in charge of her questions about this varied sounding of the waters, noted by her in the wakeful hours of her first night at the nursing-home.

This lady was benevolent, Lizarann was convinced. But for all that, she was like the stout Chinese carved in wood who sat all day long in the window of the tea-shop Aunt Stingy bought a quarter of a pound at a time at, nearly opposite Trott Street. Only then this image was evidently a portrait of a benevolent Chinese, of whom no little girl would have been afraid to ask questions about the tides. Lizarann reasoned on the position before she ventured on speech. Then she said: "I heard that all the time I was in bed. Yass!—through the open window."

"Poor little woman!" said the lady. "Yes, my dear, that's the water. It's the sound it makes."

"It didn't kept me awike," said Lizarann, anxious not to reflect upon the sea, of which she knew her Daddy had a high opinion. But the lady had said, "Poor little woman!" on general principles; not, as the little girl supposed, with reference to wakefulness caused by it.

"Some little girls like it very much," was the comment.

Lizarann wished this lady had thrown out a hint, for her guidance, as to whether these were good little girls or bad little girls. She would have to risk something, evidently. "I like it very much, please," she said tentatively. "Please, ma'am, don't you?"

"I can't say I do, my dear. It fusses me. But then I sleep at the back." Lizarann was disappointed. She had, in fact, been

cherishing an idea that the Mandarin-like, placid seeming of this lady had resulted from the soothing lullaby of the ocean, heard night and day. Clearly it would be safest to leave personal experiences and speak of Physical Geography. Lizarann had a question to ask:

"Did it went on just like that when my Daddy went viyages aboardship?"

"Did it go on just like that? Yes, dear! It went on just like that. More so, sometimes!"

"Louderer and louderer? And then it blowed a gale?"

"And then it blew a gale. I dare say." The Mandarin looked benevolently round at her patient, and added: "We're very nautical."

Now Lizarann missed the last syllable, and therefore thought that she and the lady, for some reason unknown, were very naughty. Of course, the lady knew best; and, as she herself was inculpated, would never be so dishonourable as to tell. So Lizarann asked for no explanations. But she wanted to know about the tides, and some points in navigation. Presently an incident supplied a text.

"Why did the lady ran away from the water?"

"Because she didn't want wet stockings." Yes—that was clear enough. But why did the water run after the lady?—Lizarann asked, recasting her question. "Because the tide's coming in," said her informant.

Explanations followed—not embarrassingly deep ones; the moon was left out altogether. The water would come right up to where we were at two o'clock because it was spring-tide. Then it would go back again for the same reason; which seemed inconsistent to Lizarann, who was no politician. But she was not really keen about the physical questions involved. As soon as courtesy permitted, she reintroduced her personal interest.

"When my Daddy was sarving aboardship"—it was funny to hear the child repeat her father's words, said the Mandarin after—"did he *seed* the water go in and out, like we do?"

"If he was on the coast."

"Are *we* on the scoast?"

"We are at Chalk Cliff, and Chalk Cliff's on the coast." Lizarann didn't see why we should wash our hands of the coast, and throw the whole responsibility on Chalk Cliff. But she accepted this too; only, further definition would be welcome.

"Those are ships?" she half asked, half affirmed, looking out to sea.

"Those are ships. Some big, some little."

"Are they on the scoast?"

"Oh dear no!—miles away." Then Lizarann was beginning, languidly, a demonstration that her Daddy, when voyaging on board ship, could not also be on the coast and observe the tides, when the Mandarin—good, well-intentioned woman that she was—must needs feel her patient's pulse, and say she mustn't talk too much and make herself cough, and advised her to lie quiet, and even go to sleep. Lizarann repudiated sleep, as she wanted to watch the life around, and was only wishing she hadn't got so tired with that railway-journey yesterday. It would have been so nice to catch prawns and make sand-castles, like the Children. But she acquiesced in inaction, to her own surprise; and to her still greater surprise waked suddenly, shortly after, from a dream of Bridgetticks and her small self building sand-castles in the gutter in Tallack Street, and terribly in dread of the Boys.

Still, through it all, the little patient saw nothing strange in her own readiness to submit to being nursed. She was first and foremost among the disbelievers in the seriousness of her malady, and ascribed all the solicitude that was being shown about her to an epidemic of public benevolence, more or less due to misapprehensions set on foot by Dr. Spiderophel's imperfect auscultations. It was a whim he had inoculated a kind-hearted world with; and she felt, for some reason she could not analyze, that it was easiest to indulge it.

So when her eyes opened again on the glorious vision of the great wide sea her Daddy had told her of so many a time, as she nestled to his heart by that dear bygone fireside in the London slum, with Uncle Bob ending the day in a drunken drowse, and Aunt Stingy adding a chapter to her long chronicle of her world's depravity and her own merits, she made no effort towards movement—just lay still unexplained, and watched the flood coming nearer, ever nearer, to a grand sand-castle just below; and listened to the music of its ripples, and wondered at the builders' exultation over the coming cataclysm, the wreck of their morning's work. It seemed illogical, that shout of joy when a larger wavelet than its fellows glanced ahead of them, and catching sight of the majestic structure, rushed emulously on to be the first to undermine it. But not illogical neither, to be proud of the gallant stand that castle made against the seas; a miniature Atlantis dying game, protesting to the last! Nor when the final effort of the British Channel made of it mere oblivion—an evanescence in sand and foam and floating weed—to mingle a general concession

towards going home to dinner now, with resolutions to come at sunrise, or thereabouts, and build a bigger one still to-morrow.

The Mandarin lady was conversing with a family when Lizarann opened her eyes, and all were looking towards the patient. But if what they said was overheard by her, it was not understood; it was to the child only a part of the general goodwill the World seemed bent on showing towards herself.

"Very quick sometimes," said the lady, who couldn't have been really Chinese, or the family wouldn't have called her Miss Jane. Then the family's mamma, whose beauty seized on Lizarann so, almost, as to take her attention off the sand-castle, said, "Poor, darling little thing! How sad!" And then the castle was overwhelmed, turrets, battlements, and flag; and if Lizarann had heard that much, she certainly heard no more, and attached little meaning to that.

Besides, a very succulent little boy, who could not speak for himself yet, owing to his youth, who had been interpreted as anxious to show his prawn to the little girl, was being urged by his nurse to that course, he having to all seeming suddenly wavered, and resolved to conceal the prawn—who was lukewarm and unhappy from being held too tight—in a commodious crease under his chin. Lizarann's attention was at the moment divided between solicitude for the prawn's welfare and an affection for this little boy she could not conceal, in spite of his callous indifference to the lifelong habits of his prisoner.

And then the beach and its glories had passed away, and Lizarann was aware that she had been carried indoors from a donkey-carriage she had accompanied other patients home in, and was lying down indisposed for food she recognized as nice; but trying to eat it too, to oblige Miss Jane, the Mandarin, who seemed to have taken a great fancy to her. Only she couldn't the least account for *why* it should be such an effort to eat her dinner; and ended by putting it down to the absence of her Daddy, and wanting sorely to be back with him at Mrs. Fox's; or—strange preference! —bringing him home from Bladen Street an intact Daddy as of old, albeit eyeless by hypothesis, and all the dreadful accident a dream.

There were reservations, though, to the way she let her heart go back to those sweet stethoscopeless days. To make none would have been disloyal to Teacher and to Mr. Yorick—oh yes!—and to Phœbe and Joan, and Mrs. Fox, and even to Aunt Bessy, though the latter was not a really well-informed person, and Dr. Spiderophel, who was more sinned against than sinning, the victim of a

fraudulent black pipe! If she were still the little pilot of her eyeless Daddy through the crowded streets, what would she now be to Teacher, who had got to be a sort of mother to her?—what but one of a swarm of little girls in time, or otherwise, for religious instruction at a quarter-to-nine, and breaking loose in possession of two hours' more secular information at twelve, except Saturday? What but an unknown unit of a crowded slum to Mr. Yorick? Just think!—if there were no Mr. Yorick . . .!

"I think we may put it down to the fatigue of the journey yesterday. You'll back me up in that, doctor?"

But the head physician of the Convalescent Home, who answered Miss Jane, the Mandarin, wasn't a firmly outlined character. "I see no objection to that," he answered. "But there's very strong feebleness—very strong feebleness! Shouldn't say too much about anything."

"I see," said Miss Jane. And that was all she said. But Lizarann, who heard more than she was supposed to hear, this time, formed a very low opinion of her new medical adviser. As if she had anything the matter with her! She had a better opinion of Miss Jane; and when that lady asked her, referring to a letter she wrote that afternoon to Adeline Fossett—who was a friend of hers, it seemed—what message she was to give on Lizarann's behalf, the patient had no misgiving about entrusting a full cargo of loves and kisses for delivery to her.

As she lay and listened in a half-dream in the sunny room, with the air coming in from the sea, to its distant murmur mixing with the drone of those untiring flies on the ceiling, and the scratching of Miss Jane's pen near at hand, the recent arrival at the Home had no suspicion how serious a report of her case that lady was framing. She lay and wondered when that long letter would come to an end, and looked forward to the sweet experience of rejoining her Daddy, and talking more to him about the sea he had known so well in the days when there was no Lizarann. *She* knew it now too; and was going to know it better still to-morrow.

"We shall have to make up our minds, Bess," said Athelstan Taylor two or three days later to his sister-in-law, at Royd.

"To . . .?" said Miss Caldecott, in brief interrogation.

"We shall have to make up our minds what to say to Jim Coupland. You see what Addie thinks?"

Aunt Bessy saw, she said. But after reflection hit upon an escape from painful inferences. Didn't Addie sometimes look on

the worst side of things? "Perhaps she does," said the Rector, and felt more cheerful over it. Then he got sundry letters from his pocket, and re-read them. His little access of cheerfulness seemed chilled by the reading, for when he had ended he shook his head, in his own confidence, and sighed as he refolded the letters.

"Let me look at them again," said Miss Caldecott. Both knew the contents of these letters perfectly, and each knew the other knew them. But it looked like weighing them in a more accurate pair of scales than the last, every time of reading.

"Make anything of them?" the Rector asked, but got no answer. The letters were being read slowly. Justice was being done to the question.

But the truth was Aunty Bessy was suppressing her inspirations because she couldn't trust her voice with them. She was a dry and correct lady, but affectionate for all that; and it was her affection for Lizarann that had got in her throat, and would have to subside before she could screw herself up to pooh-poohing the letter Miss Jane the Chinese had written to Adeline Fossett, with such a bad account of her patient. This was the letter we left Lizarann listening to, as she lay looking forward to the sea, next day.

Presently the answer came, following on a short cough or two connected with the throat-symptom:—"I do think people of that sort are often very inconsiderate. Don't you?"

"Which sort?"

"People who are constantly in contact with this kind of thing—matrons of hospitals—nurses—all that sort! However, you know best."

"Miss Fanshawe's a very old friend of Addie's, and tells her the truth perhaps more freely because of her own experience—knows about Gus, and remembers Cecilia." The name of the Chinese, then, was Fanshawe. Cecilia was the sister that died.

"Perhaps," said Miss Caldecott. "Isn't the post very late?"

The post was audible without, with a powerful provincial accent. After debate—which accounted for the post's lateness—its boots departed down the garden gravel-path, and Rachel brought in the letters, and said, "Shall I shut up, miss?" as Pandora's box might have said, if willing to oblige.

The Rector was keen on one letter; the others might wait. Miss Caldecott said, "Addie, I see," and waited also to read her own letters. Then the usual course was followed in such cases. The Rector read, and said, "All right! Directly," and, "Just half-a-second!" in response to, "Well?" which came at intervals, like

minute-guns with notes of interrogation after them. Then expansive relief followed in his voice. "Oh yes!—that's very satisfactory. Now I shall be able to tell Jim." Then he surrendered one letter and read the other, saying as he neared the end, "Ah well!—it's *substantially* the same. I'm so glad we got them to-night."

"I thought it was that," said Miss Caldecott. "Naturally, people who see so many cases of this sort get frightened at every little thing." She read the letter aloud, making selections: "'Was up and walked about on the beach this morning.' You see, Athel? 'Sea air very often has that effect at first'—oh, that's what Addie herself says—'expect the Vim Æthericum will do wonders.' Some new medicine, I suppose. What does Miss Fanshawe's own letter say?"

"Only what Addie reports. But I don't quite like . . ."

"What?"

"You'll see at the end there. 'Must be thankful she suffers so little'?"

"Oh, Athel! Now you *are* begging and borrowing troubles."

"Well—I didn't like the wording of it. However, I think I shall be justified in not reading that bit to her father. Poor Jim!"

This was in July, a fortnight or thereabouts before Challis paid his visit to the Rectory. It is a good sample of the sort of thing that had gone on in the interim. The sort of thing only very young or very lucky folk are unfamiliar with—the bulletin-foundry's intense anxiety to make the most of every little scrap of nourishment for Hope, on the one hand; on the other, the amazing capacity of Hope for growing quite bloated on starvation diet.

All the news that reached Jim about his dying child—the words give the truth, brutally; but what does the story gain by flinching from them?—was what a succession of kind hearts had tried to make the best of, each without a particle of conscious wish to falsify or suppress. What wonder that when Challis saw him at the well that day, Jim was using the mere letter of the daily tidings he received to silence the misgivings that were whispering to his heart? But they were there for all that, making deadly forecasts in his mind of a life he would have to live, he knew not how—a life that was darkness now, but still had a light shining in that darkness that it heeded—a light that helped oblivion of the cruel past. What would be left for him if that solace were withdrawn?

He had always an undercurrent of suspicion that the evil was

being made the best of, for his sake. And in the greatness of his heart—for Jim had a great heart—he felt pity for those who had to be the bearers of ill news; none of them cut out for indifference to the suffering of its hearers. If he lost his little lass, the Master—so he still called Athelstan Taylor—would have to come and tell him; and Jim would have been glad he should be spared the pain, after so much kindness to himself and the lassie. Only, that pain would not be outside the range of pity; a practicable human pain that could be thought of and dealt with—not a pain like his own if the lassie followed her mother. Or rather, that last pain would be no pain at all; merely the dumb extinction of a soul. Or would it be like the anæsthetic that multiplies suffering tenfold, and leaves its victim inexpressive—just mere adamant? So much the better! Death would come the sooner.

But all the information Jim received was softened down, and he knew it. A murmur he could not have found voice to speak aloud was always in the inmost chambers of his mind, prompting doubt of the reports that reached him. But he never showed a sign of his growing consciousness of the gathering cloud, unless it were that he listened to his news, as he got it, more and more in silence.

"How would he be the better if we did send him?" said Athelstan Taylor to his sister-in-law, less than three weeks later. "He might just arrive to find her dying. How would he know his little lass? Not 'by the feel' now! Addie says she's gone to a mere shadow. Not by the voice. . . ." His own broke, and he stopped. Aunt Bessy sobbed in a window-recess, and thought she dried her tears unnoticed.

They had been walking to and fro and about the room in restless perturbation, she interlacing the uneasy fingers of hands that wandered to her brows when free, then interlaced again; he somewhat firmer, but with lips not quite within control. He held the yellow paper of a telegram to hand an hour since, and kept re-reading the twenty-odd words that made it up, failing always to read any new and better meaning into the heart of their brevity. It had come enclosed in a letter from Adeline Fossett, who had the day previously been wired for suddenly by Miss Jane, the Chinese lady at Chalk Cliff. A short and grisly summons she knew the meaning of at once, following as it did on a forewarning letter thirty-six hours ago—a letter that teemed with excruciating assurance that there was no "immediate danger," but that when there was the writer would send a telegram at once. She had kept her word.

That letter, forwarded promptly on to the Rectory, had made heart-sick discussion between Athelstan Taylor and Aunt Bessy since its arrival by this morning's post. What ought to be said?—what *could* be said to the father of the dying child, who was now looking forward to her near return home, building still whatever structures of hope the hesitating, irresolute tidings of a month past had left a weak foundation for? Who was to say to Jim that the time had come to give up that sweet vision he to this hour was trying hard to cherish, of a miraculous late summer and his little lass again, beside him at the well-head, in the sunshine? Who was to shatter the thin crust of artificial hopes that still kept under the fires of his misgivings, and leave them free to break loose through the crater of a volcano of despair?

"How would he be the better?" the Rector asked again presently. "And if I say to him now, 'Lizarann is dying, but you cannot be beside her when she dies'—why—will not that be quite the worst thing of all? I can only judge by imagining myself in his position. Poor Jim!"

"You must do as you think best, Athel dear," said Aunt Bessy. She was not a tower of strength in a crisis, this good lady; but she wouldn't hinder, though she couldn't help. Only, there are ways and ways of not hindering. Her brother-in-law would have liked another sample, this time one with less flavour of protest.

"Just look at it this way, Bessy," said he. "If I could say to Jim, 'The doctors are sending bad accounts of the little one, and you must come with me straight away to see how things are going'—well!—that would be quite another thing. But to prepare him for bad news, and the rest of it, and then leave him alone in the cottage . . .!"

"He will be alone in the cottage. I had forgotten that. But it won't be so soon . . . surely . . .?" The hushed voice shows what is referred to—the "arch-fear in a terrible form" on whose face Europe at least cannot bear to look. How rarely does even the bravest among us speak of the grim terror by name, with reference to a particular case! What does it matter? Ways of saying the same thing are provided by conventions that seem quite alive to the whereabouts of the sting of Death, of the victory of the Grave. If the language of the daily press is any evidence on the subject, the Immortalism of the Creeds is only skin-deep. Disorders terminate fatally; folk breathe their last; they share the common lot; they succumb; none is so old and weary with the storms of Fate that the vernacular forecast of his release will not "anticipate the worst." But nobody *dies*, except

paupers, in contemporary speech. Did you ever hear of a disorder "terminating fatally" in a workhouse? Or perhaps insolvents die—was one ever known to succumb?

Aunt Bessy was flinching before the inexorable, and pleading for useless respite. "I know what it means," said the Rector, "when telegrams like this begin. The old story!" He put the point aside with a sigh. "Ah well!—anyhow, Jim may be alone for some days. It isn't even as if I could be with him now and again. I *must* go to this Memorial business at Chipping Chester, and I can't get off stopping to marry Audrey: she would never forgive me." He enumerated other engagements—things that would keep him absent a week—even longer. They were matters quite outside the story.

"When do you suppose old Margy will be back?"

"How can I tell? When do you suppose her niece's baby intends to be born?"

CHAPTER XLVII

OF THE APPROACH OF LIZARANN'S RETURN, AND HOW JIM'S HOPES WERE FED BY OLD DAVID. HOW JIM DID NOT CURSE A MOTOR-CAR. HOW LIZARANN DIED OF TUBERCULOSIS

So it had come about that for weeks past news of Lizarann, that none could doubt the meaning of, came to the Rectory, and that all of it that passed on to her Daddy reached him corrected out of all knowledge—the sting withdrawn.

Had he been able to read the letters that contained it himself, this would not have been possible. Some may have a stone ready to cast at Athelstan Taylor for this. The story has none. It was a question with the Rector of allowing poor Jim a few more days of false hope in order that he himself might be beside him in the first of his despair. His own easiest course, far and away, would have been to read Adeline Fossett's last letter to the poor fellow aloud, say, "God's will be done!" and so forth, and get away to Chipping Chester. But he had it in his mind to go to Jim when the use of the knife became inevitable, and remain with him, if Mrs. Fox were still away, at least until the day of her return. He shrank from leaving him alone in the cottage, a tortured soul in a sunless universe, within reach of a razor.

Had he conceived for one moment what the speed of events would be, his course might have been different. But the letters that he could not read aloud to Jim were misleading on one point. The writer caught constantly at the only easement words could be found for, that the actual hour or day, or even week, of Death could not be forecast. The dear little thing was not actually *dying;* she might live for weeks, even months. But the doctor here—said Miss Jane Fanshawe—who really had had immense experience, thought the case could only end one way. Still, the temperature was half a degree lower to-day, and we thought the air was beginning to tell. We should be able to see better when she was got back home, with her old surroundings. She fretted a good deal about her Daddy. That was the general tone of the penultimate letter. Then came the one Miss Fossett enclosed on with the telegram which followed it. It came too late for the Rector to modify his plan of operations.

So Jim lived on by himself, and thought of his little lass, counting the days to her return. He spoke with no one, water-customers apart, except a neighbour who had undertaken to see to his needs in Mrs. Fox's absence. His dog was under the impression that it was *he* that was doing this, and there can be no doubt that he actually did conduct his master to and from the well. But nobody, except his canine self, believed that he had any share in cooking the dinner or making the beds.

Each long day that went by was a day nearer to the blind man's hearing of his child's voice. It would come, and would be hers once more—many times more than once. His reason might whisper to him of one end, and one alone, in some vague terrible future, to this insidious plague that had stolen on him like a thief in the night, to rob him of his happiness—the one jewel his darkness and his crippled limbs had left him. But that the hour was at hand, and the word spoken, that the light in his heart should be utterly quenched, and leave his soul to a darkness blacker than the void his eyesight had become—this was an idea it was not in him to receive, a thought that nature rose against.

No!—her return would be very soon now, and he knew how it would come. He had nothing to guide him to the day or the hour beyond his knowledge of the term first fixed—six weeks from the day of her departure. But he knew what would be his first hearing of it. She would call out to him—he was sure of that—the signal he had taught her to greet him with, in the old days of Bladen Street; the word he had listened for so many a time as he felt his way, touching with his stick the long blank wall he had to pass before he could feel her little hand in his. He dreamed and dwelt upon the moment when he should hear that call again, "Pi-lot!"

The villagers coming to the well for water were a great solace to him; a mine of robust hopefulness in which the choke-damp of misgiving was unknown. Often when Jim was downhearted about the little lass—had got a hump about her, as he phrased it—some village matron's voice would come to him like a breath of fresh air. "Yow'ull be having yower little maid back again vairy soon now, Master Coupland!" And the sympathetic confidence bred in Jim's own voice would help him to a conviction that it was well-grounded, as he answered, "Aye, mistress, sure! But a very little time to run now!" Even when the slight insecurity implied in the addendum, "Please God!"—making the little lass's return conditional on anything—weakened the robust language of unqualified Hope, Jim received it as a mere concession to the

prejudices of Society. Besides, he and his Maker were on better terms now, since his initiation into church-music.

No note of alarm had reached the villagers; in fact, the Rector and his sister-in-law kept their information to themselves. Even Phœbe and Joan, when they paid Jim visits of consolation—every other day or thereabouts—were a reassuring element; though so near sources of better, or worse, information. They—poor little souls!—knew nothing of death close at hand, though alive to funerals, somewhat as a counsel's children might be alive to law-suits.

It was near the close of a cloudless day in the fourth week of that August that Jim, undisturbed by applicants for water, was enjoying his last pipe before starting for home. He was not alone. One of the very old men one knows so well in every village was with him; a survival of the past who will tell you tales of your grandfathers, and end them up with some memory of a grandchild of his own, then living. Death is keeping them in mind, be sure!—will not forget them in the end, even though they may tax his recollection for another decade. This one could remember his childhood better than the events of yesterday, and though he could tell but little of it, was not quite without a record of Waterloo. For he could recall how his father held him up, a child of five, to see the blaze on Crumwen Beacon yander, when they loighted up fires all round about for the news that had come of the great battle across the water. But as for Nelson and Trafalgar, inquired about keenly by Jim, as pages from the same book, he could say nothing of them; they were afower his time. But he minded when they painted up the sign of the Lord Nelson on the roo-ad to th' Castle, with an empty sleeve to his cwo-at; and the painter of un didn't know his trade, and put stoof with th' payunt to ma'ak it show up gay, and look at un now!

"It's a tidy bit o' time too, Master David," said Jim. "Many a year afore ever I was heard tell of."

"Aye well—that's so! But you'll be quite a yoong ma'an, coo-unting by years. Why, I lay you'll be yoonger by many a year than Peter Fox's widow—she that's gone to her sister in Loon'un."

"My old mother at the cottage? Ah, she'll be my age twice told, and a spell thrown in."

"Aye—aye! She's getting on, forward, now you ne'am it. But I mind her when she first came to these parts—just a yoong

wench, not long wed—more by token my power missus lay dying at the time. . . . Noa!—I'd been marrud woonce afower then—marrud to Sarah Tracey—you may ree-ad her ne'am on the sto'an in the graveyard. But for Peter Fox's widow, she was a coomly yoong wench, shooerly!"

He wandered among domestic events, until the dog, feeling he was being taken too little notice of, remonstrated. The substance of his communication, interpreted by Jim, was that it was time to be getting back home. On the road, his opinion was they were going too slow, and he endeavoured to drag his master at a trot. Old David commented on the restlessness of youth.

"But you won't be needing th' yoong poop soon, Master Coupland. That little maid of yowern she'll be coomin' ba-ack, I lay, none so many days ahead."

Here was a chance for Jim to reassure himself.

"For all I could say," said he, "the lassie may be up at the Rectory now. She'd come with her lady, as I make it out; just for the first go off, seeing the old mother's not handy for to nurse her up. Not that there'd be the need for it, to my judgment. These here doctor's stories . . ."

The old man interrupted him, stopping in the road to speak, with an uplifted impressive finger. "Do'ant ye hearken to none o' they, Master Coupland. They be a main too clever, that they be! Why, I'm not the only ma'an with a tale to tell about they doctors?"

"What might your tale be, Master David?"

"My tale? Now I only say this to ye, Master Coupland. Just ye look at me. . . . Aye—be sure!—I should ha' said, feel hold of my arm. . . . There now!—where do ye find th' hospital pa'atient in that? Towerned o' ninety-nine year, last Whitsuntide! What'll your doctors ma'ak of that?"

"Won't they give you a clean bill, Master David?"

"Couldn't roightly say, Master Coupland, without consooltin' of 'em. And I can tell ye this much, they'll have to make shift without me; you may tell 'em so! Now, you hearken to me, not to they." The voice of the old boy, so nearly a centenarian, rose quite to vigour as he worked up his indignation against leechcraft.

"That little maid of yowern, she has a bit o' cough o' nights?"

"Aye, aye!—a fair sort of a cough—comes and goes by the season."

"Ah!—and I lay, now and again o' nights, she'll sweat like to sop a flannel shirt through, like a spoonge?"

"And that's true, too!"

"And happen she's thinned doon a bit?—happen she hasn't . . .?"

"To the touch o' my hand, belike! But I'm an onsartain judge—and that's the truth."

"Now I'm telling ye this." The old man stood still to make his tale the more impressive, his thousand wrinkles and his few grey hairs all fraught with emphasis that was lost on his hearer; though the sight of them in the afterglow might have held a passer-by, and made him listen. He repeated: "I'm tellin' ye this, Master Coupland. If ye could have handled me when I was a yoong lad of mebbe fowerteen year, or fifteen, you would just have felt through to th' boans. *And* the cough, night and mowerning—my word! You might well ha' thowt yower little maiden's just a gay trifle. . . . What said th' doctor?" The old man laughed scornfully, if toothlessly. "Said to my moother she might let the oonderta'aker measure me for my coffin. And she was that simple she took his word for it, and vairy nigh did . . . ah!—you may be laughin'—but vairy nigh she did! And there was I the while, just turned off my food and drink for a spell! Groo-wun I was, I ta'ak it. And to hear doctor cha-atterin', cha-atterin'! Such a maze o' wo'ords, it passes thinkin' where he could have gotten so ma-any. Ha—ha—ho!" And the old man resumed his walk with, "Eighty-fower year agone, Master Coupland, and me here, hale and hearty, to tell the tale!"

And no doubt a good deal of the tale was true, and the good-will of its narrator past all question. But he was making the most of it for the sake of the pleasure it gave him to cheer up the blind man's loneliness, without thinking quite enough of his responsibility to truth. When he wished Master Coupland sound sleep and pleasant dreams at the gate of the little cottage, and went slowly on to his own home in the village, he was saying good-bye to a man only too ready to give the rein to the horses of the chariot of Hope, even without an excuse. And here he had one, surely.

So, through his lonely supper—for, granting it cooked and placed on the table, Jim had a marvellous faculty of shifting for himself—he was building a sweet castle in the air with the materials so good-naturedly placed at his disposal. He imagined to himself as a thing to be to-morrow, if it had not already come to pass to-day, a journey home of a reinstated Lizarann, all eagerness for her Daddy. Not an exorbitantly robust little lass—he would not be unreasonable—but one perceptibly better than the one that left him a month since; whose kisses he could still feel, was soon to feel again. As he lighted his pipe in the garden with a vesuvian

—for he never lit it in the house when alone, for safety's sake—and sat smoking under the stars in the clematis arbour, now beginning to lose its glory, it glowed in unison with the fire of a stimulated hope the old man's tale had kindled. If old David had been worse off eighty-four years ago than Lizarann, why should not the child have many a long year of life before her—aye!—even after he, Jim, had borne the last of his troubles, and was laid beside Dolly in the grave? Short of that, why should not he at least treasure the hope of the month to come, with Lizarann herself beside him in the warmth of that late summer the gentleman had all but guaranteed? For this castle in Spain owed a great deal of its vividness to Challis's obliging meteorology. He had vouched for "St. Augustin's Summer," and it sounded well.

Then a painful thought came to him. It had fretted him before this, at intervals. How if that grave where Dolly lay could not be found? What did he know about it? Little enough! Priscilla knew; she had arranged all that—as Jim, for all his good-nature, suspected—with a certain ghoul-like joy. But suppose, when he himself came to an end, Lizarann wished to place as much as was left of him beside her mother, where was the Lizarann of that day to find her? Well!—he could do nothing about it now. He would speak to the master, and make a clear chart, for the lassie's sake. No question came in here of how *he* might be the survivor, and have to place *her* in her mother's grave. Old David's tale had been an opiate to thoughts like that, and his heart rested on it.

Oh yes!—Lizarann was due, to-morrow or next day at furthest. She would tell him about the sea. He could bear to hear of it from her—his lassie who had seen it—though he had fought shy of actually hearing what he could never see again himself.

He was so happy in his dwelling on her near return, and the glamour he had clothed it with, that he could smoke there beneath the starlight he could not see, and think of his old nights on shipboard without a pang. Little things came back to him, long forgotten; one particularly, slight enough in itself, but so unlike Tallack Street and the spurious match trade! A wandering ice-floe from the Antarctic Circle, as the ship passed the Falkland Islands; and upon it, clear in the light of a great golden moonrise, a huge white she-bear with one young cub. They were drifting northward—ever northward—to the heat, and the seeming firm ground beneath their feet would melt quicker and quicker each day, to fail them altogether in the end, and leave them to die hard—the strong swimmers—in the deadly warmth of some tropic sea. Jim wondered at the thoughtlessness of his young day of brute courage and

heedless energy, and how he never had a thought *then* for the mother-bear and her despair of saving her child in that plain of immeasurable waters; while *now,* for some unexplained reason, it was quite a discomfort to him to think of it, there in old Margy's arbour under the clematis. But presently he suspected a reason why he felt a new feeling over it. How if his hold over his child, his precious possession, was melting—melting away! He brushed the intolerable thought aside! Could he not feel for the poor soul on the iceberg, bear though she was, without that? Oh yes!—Lizarann would come to-morrow.

All this trouble, and doctoring, and the like, makes a man raw, thought poor Jim to himself, seeking for apologies for his failure to attain a Spartan ideal. 'Tain't like then-a-days, when you might be in a high sea any hour of the day or night, and be whistled up to take in sail—as he was, to be sure, out of a dream about Dolly, that very time he saw the Flying Dutchman, and lost his sight the week after. . . . There now!—where was the use of going back on bygones, when Lizarann would be here to-morrow, to hear him tell again about the Dutchman, with all her added knowledge of the sea to help.

But it was true, for all that, that a man got soft with nothing to rouse him up like, and keep him off of nursing up his old grievances, with ne'er a soul nigh to throw a word to. Jim never felt any too sure, neither, that his new cult of music was not an enervating luxury. Undermining musical phrases crept into his practice as a chorister that made him no better—mind you!—than a cry-baby. There was one in particular that was almost cruel to him in its beauty—it was as a matter of fact an adaptation by the Rector of that Ave Maria of Arkadelt that you know as well as we do—and he sang it aloud to the night-wind stirring in the trees, and the owls, for by now night was over all, in a kind of bravado, to show that he could bear it. But his voice broke on the last cadence, do what he might. "There, ye see!—just come of being so lonesome!" Jim spoke aloud to the darkness and the owls, to feel his solitude less if it might be.

But what did it matter when his lassie was coming to-morrow—coming to-morrow!

How the time was passing! There went the cottage clock again the third time since Jim lighted his first pipe after supper. Surely he must be mistaken!—it would stop on the stroke of ten. He counted the deliberate strokes, each with its long preliminary warning; and on the eleventh said to himself that he must have counted wrong. Could he possibly be within an hour of the day

that was to bring him Lizarann? Listen for the church-clock of the village, and make sure! He could hear his own heart beating in the stillness, even through the monotone of a cricket somewhere close at hand. Old Margy's clock was a bit fast always. . . .

There!—sure enough this time, the first stroke on the wind. Jim counted steadily to the tenth, and all but made quite certain he had heard the last, so long did the pause seem to his anxiety, when yet another came. No mistake this time. Eleven! Bedtime.

Was it true? One hour more, and he might be asleep, to wake up to the day that would bring him back the thing that was dearer to him than the light no day would ever bring again. Only an hour!

His little dog, sharper of hearing even than he, caught a coming sound afar, and started up in sudden indignation, dog-wise, that something, somewhere, was presuming to exist without consulting him! Whatever it was, Jim thought a restraining finger in his collar a good precautionary measure; with a slight admonition that a smothered growl, for the present, would meet all the needs of the case. It continued to express, under protest, a deep, heart-felt resentment as of a wrong too great to be endured, and still Jim could not spot the cause. At last a motor-horn, somewhere, perhaps, on the far side of the village—two miles away, say!

Loud and faint, by turns, through the village; then clearer on the open road, and then the noise of wheels at great speed. The little dog, probably catching the blinding glare of the lamps, lost all self-control at those two great unheard-of wrongs to his kind, and gave way to his feelings without reserve. Then a rush and a dust-cloud, left to do its worst, at leisure, to the lungs of man and cattle and plants, and a stench to poison the sweet air of heaven. And then a couple of folk had been carried, quicker than need was, from Thanes Castle to Royd Hall, with the execrations of a small population behind them.

Jim was too happy at heart to curse even a motor-car. Besides, he remembered how once this very car had given his little lass a ride. He owed it a benediction rather. He felt his way to his couch, and had got his wooden leg off, and found his pillow, before the reek of petrol had died away, and was asleep almost as soon as the little dog beside him. Was it his last sleep there before he should hear his little lassie's voice again?

The gas was turned down low, almost to extinction, in the ward of the Chalk Cliff Nursing Home, where Adeline Fossett was pre-

paring to pass the night beside her little invalid's bed. There was no other patient in the room. Miss Jane, looking worn and sad, was just saying good-night, with a small hand-lamp in her hand, whose green shade was no help to the pallor of either lady. Both knew what was pending; neither knew how soon.

"Ring if you have the least doubt about it, dear," said Miss Fanshawe. "But my own impression is this will go on a day or two longer. I can't say, but I think if there's a change you'll see it."

"I won't scruple to call you. But I suppose there's nothing to be done that I can't do?"

"Nothing at all. No one can do anything now. Good-night, Adeline!" As she opened the door to go, a muffled clock outside struck midnight. "It's twenty minutes fast," said she, as she closed the door. Then, as Miss Fossett sat in the half-darkness in the large chair by the bedside, she could hear two sounds—the interrupted breathing of the little patient on the bed, and the rapid, irritating ticking of her own watch, laid by chance on something resonant. It would become maddening, she knew, in the growth of the stillness, as the night took its hold upon her; so presently she rose and quenched it. Then, being up, she went to the window, just open for ventilation, and feeling the soft air, warm for late August, opened it gently to its width, and leaned out. The voice of the water was a bare murmur now, away off over half a league of sand; and the wind must have changed, for the bells of a church a mile inland were striking twelve at leisure, and were clear through the silence; till, a railway-yell cutting them off at the tenth stroke, they wavered, lost heart, and died. These were sounds new to the day at Chalk Cliff, bathed for forty-eight hours in a southwest wind, off the sea.

"What did you say, darling?" She closed the window gently, and went back to the bed, to hear. . . . "Why can't you hear the waves? Is that it? Because the tide's going out. Because it's gone out as far as it can go."

"Can't it go no furver?" asks the voice from the pillow, through a breath that goes heavily.

"Not to-day. Next time it goes out it will—at least, I think so." The speaker was not sure on the point, but she had caught sight of a three-quarter moon, and that would do to quote in case of catechism. She turned on the light slightly, to talk by; then sat by the bed again. But Lizarann's days of scientific inquiry are over. She listens for the sea though, because her Daddy once went sea-voyages, still.

"Mustn't I be took to my Daddy in free dyes, by the rilewye?" The sound of the railway-whistle through the window has helped to this.

"Yes, darling; in three or four days you shall go to Daddy. There's a big grape with the skin off for you to suck. Such a big one! Try if you like it."

Lizarann gives her old nod, with the grape in her mouth. She is refusing other diet now, and it was clear two days since that nourishing food and stimulants had been given every chance and failed. She is to be allowed to die in peace, being in good hands.

"I do love you, Teacher, very, very much!"

"So do I, darling. . . . There are no pips to spit out, because I took them all out. Another? . . . No?—very well, dear; then I won't bother you. . . . The counterpane?—it's too heavy? Very well, dear, we'll have it off . . . so!"

Which of us, over five-and-twenty, has the luck to be still a stranger to the penultimate restlessness of coming Death—to the hands that will still be weakly seeking for God knows what!—the speech that cannot frame some want its would-be speaker may be helpless to define, but will not give up attempting? Lizarann is nearing that stage fast—faster than Adeline Fossett thought when Miss Jane left her but now.

But her mind is quite clear still on the great main point of her small life. The words "Only Daddy most!" show the continuous current of her thought, coming as they do a long pause after her apostrophe to "Teacher."

"Of course Daddy most, darling child!" says the latter. "But Mr. Yorick very much too!"

The name arouses enthusiasm. "Oh, very, very much too!" But this is too great a tax on the poor little lungs, tubercle-gripped, and an attempt to follow with a schedule of loves deserved and granted fails, and quiet is imperative.

Adeline Fossett turned down the light again, and remained silent, listening to the heavy breathing, with its ugly little spasmodic jerk now and again. She was unhappy in her mind, over and above grief. Here was this little thing with only a few days at most to live—she was convinced of that—and utterly unconscious of her state. Was it right—was it fair—to leave her so? All the traditions of her religious cult from youth upward said no; according to them, the dying were to prepare, or be prepared, for death. But when the patient was simply slipping almost painlessly away—seeming at least to suffer only from an inexplicable feverish unrest, never from acute pain that could not be denied

at will—what was to be gained by thrusting on a childish mind a demand to face the black contingency, to make a formal acknowledgment of the grave? Would it not be safe to give one little soul Godspeed into the Unknown, whose only care was now that each of her many loves should be known to their recipients, each in its right degree? Would not those very loves be as garments to shelter the new-born soul in the world beyond, whether the date of its arrival was now or hereafter? She was shocked at the venturesome impiety of the question she half-asked herself:—Could she not trust God for that? A happy inspiration hinted at a half-answer in the affirmative, and biassed her to silence.

Another anxiety, perhaps more pressing still, took the place of that one. Ought she not to have written more explicitly to the Rectory about the child's state? On her arrival, in answer to Miss Fanshawe's telegram, she had found nothing to warrant prediction of the days, or even weeks, that the tension might be prolonged. All she could say with certainty was that Lizarann was at present quite unfit to be moved, but that it was impossible to foresee. We must wait on events. But she said never a word to set any hopes afoot. She had written almost daily; once in answer to a letter of Athelstan Taylor, telling how he might have to go away for a few days, and of his resolution of silence with respect to Jim. She was, at first, inclined to disappove this course, but later saw that it was unavoidable, and wrote to that effect. Still, the idea of Jim in ignorance, nourishing hopes, perhaps, while his little lass lay there dying, was an excruciating one. She said to herself repeatedly that it was merely an idea, that the co-temporaneousness of a death with far greater unconsciousness of its possibility than Jim's was an everyday occurrence. What would the wife, who now hears of her husband's death months ago, have gained by the knowledge of her widowhood, had the news come sooner? She pictured other instances to persuade the idea away. But it remained.

Miss Fanshawe, to whom this case was only one of a hundred, said to her, "If you could spirit the child's father down here to be with her when she dies, that would be another matter. But you say that's impossible. Why give him ups and downs of anxiety? Tell him what you like by way of preparation, but not till it's all over." Miss Fossett felt the truth of this view, but the position grated on her moral sense. However, she felt she must submit to the discomfort of a sense of untruth for awhile. It was not to last long.

She must have been dozing, and for longer than she could have

believed possible, when she waked suddenly to reply to the child, who had spoken, with, "Yes—darling! What did you say?"

"Aren't you going to bed, Teacher?"

"Yes, dear, presently."

"'Tin't night?"

"Yes, it's night. But that doesn't matter. I shall go to bed presently."

"When shall you go to bed?" After a pause, this.

"Presently, when Miss Jane comes. She'll come very soon." Then, in response to something only audible to close listening, "No, darling, you're not to have the nasty medicine—only the nice one. It's not time yet for either. . . . Why mustn't you have no medicine? . . . Well, darling, you know we all have to take medicine when the doctor says so. . . ."

"Did the doctor said I was ill?"

"Yes, dear, the doctor said you were ill, and to stop in bed till you were quite well . . . what?"

"And then go home to my Daddy where Mrs. Forks is?"

"And then go home to your Daddy where Mrs. Fox is." A phase of coughing comes upon this; alleviation is tried for with the nice medicine. But stimulants and sedatives have had their day in this case. Adeline Fossett is becoming alive to the fact. However, the nice medicine can still soothe a little; and in half an hour a lull comes, and a kind of sleep.

Then for the watcher another deadly doze, of jerks and nightmares. And then another waking to the sound of the little patient's voice, curiously full of life this time.

"When I'm took home to my Daddy, Teacher, where Mrs. Forks is . . ."

"Yes, dear!"

"Shall the children go on digging and spaddle in the water, just the same like now?"

"Yes, darling, just the same, till it's too cold. Then they'll go home and go to school."

"And fish for sprawns just the same?"

"Just the same."

"And when they've gone to school and no one's on the beach to see, will there be high water?"

"High water? Yes, of course, dear—every day, just the same as now . . . what?"

"And low water?"

"And low water too."

"Like when my Daddy went sea-viyages?"

"Like when your Daddy went sea-voyages." But this has been a long talk, and has gone slowly against obstacles of speech. So when Lizarann ends with a half-inaudible, "I sould tell my Daddy that," the torpor is returning, and it may be she really sleeps, for all that the breathing is so difficult. She has persisted that she suffers no pain; so Miss Fossett tries for satisfaction on that score. But the fear is that having no pain may only mean that the pain eludes description. Still, there is room for hope, of a sort.

"I've heard many cases talk like that, quite brightly, just before," says Miss Jane, standing by the bed. She has come to relieve guard, and has heard her friend's report of her night's watching. Lizarann has not moved since she spoke last, an hour ago, and still lies in what may be sleep, breathing heavily. The jerks in the breathing do not wake her, strangely.

"She was almost chattering, one time," says Miss Fossett. "Poor little darling!"

"About her Daddy?"

"Yes, and about the high and low tides, and how he went sea-voyages."

"Fancy that! The little soul! But no delirium?"

"I think none. Just a little feverishness—in the half-waking. Not delirium."

"You go to bed now. I'll call you if there is anything."

"Promise to!" A nod satisfies the speaker, who goes away to lie down. As she looks out, from a window on her way, across a sea without a ripple, she understands why the tide was unheard. Even now, scarcely a sound! She pauses a little to look at the planet blazing above the offing, and its long path of light upon the water—wonders is it Venus or Jupiter?—and passes on to rest. How callous is the bed one lies down on in one's clothes, with something over one, to get a few hours' sleep! And how hard they are to get, sometimes!

Adeline Fossett had had over three hours when she waked with a start in response to a hand on her shoulder. "I should like you to come," said Miss Jane, who then returned at once.

Lizarann, or the shadow that had been she, was propped up with pillows on the bed when Miss Fossett followed her friend two minutes later. "Is that Teacher?" was what she seemed to say. But speech was very faint indeed.

"I don't think she sees you," said Miss Jane.

"Can you hear what I say, darling?" Yes, apparently; and knows it is Teacher who speaks. What is it we can get for her? For the feverish movement of the hands, and the constant effort to articulate, have all the usual effect of baffled speech, with much to say.

Miss Fanshawe's wider hospital experience makes her less receptive of the idea. She waited, silent, while Miss Fossett asked the question more than once, before any intelligible answer came.

Then speech came suddenly to Lizarann. She wanted to get up now, and go to her Daddy. Yes!—she sould like to have her new flock on and go to her Daddy. Mustn't she go, Teacher? To which Teacher replied: "Yes, darling, you shall go, very soon. But it's night now, and Daddy's in bed."

"But I *shall* go?"

"Yes—indeed you shall! Very soon." Then Miss Fossett looked up at Miss Jane, who merely said, "Not very long now." But how strong the voice was for a moment! Yes—that would be so sometimes—sometimes even louder than that. Wasn't she speaking now?

Miss Fossett stooped to listen again. "I shall see my Daddy," is all she hears. Yes—Lizarann shall see her Daddy—it's a promise! What is that she's saying now? Be quiet and listen!

"When I see my Daddy—when I see my Daddy . . ."

"Yes—darling! What?"

"When I see my Daddy I shall call out, 'Poy-lot!'"

CHAPTER XLVIII

HOW JIM ADDED STORIES TO HIS AIR-CASTLE, AND SMOKED HIS LAST PIPE. HOW HE KNEW CHALLIS'S VOICE AGAIN. WHO HAD TO BE AT THE PARK GATE BY NINE. HOW JIM HEARD THE MOTOR COMING BACK, AND LIZARANN'S VOICE. HOW ATHELSTAN TAYLOR ARRIVED WITHOUT HER. OF JIM'S DEATH AND HERS

ATHELSTAN TAYLOR and Aunt Bessy were at breakfast when the telegram came to say all was "over unexpectedly; writing." It was opened by the Rector, who rose and handed it to his sister-in-law; then passed on to the door in time to stop an incursion of Phœbe and Joan with "Aunty's coming directly, chicks. Run away now." But not in time to prevent Joan having good grounds for asking Phœbe why Aunt Bessy was crying.

Aunt Bessy was, no doubt. And the Rector was completely upset, too, for the moment. He had not the least expected anything so soon. But his work was cut out for him now. "I must go to poor Jim at once," he said.

"Oh, Athel, Athel!" said Aunt Bessy through her sobs. "You know, don't you, dear, that Jim would have been told before if I had had my way?" It was what Athelstan himself afterwards spoke of to Adeline Fossett as "poor Bessy's I-told-you-so consolation." The Rector was grieved for her grief, and knew that this expedient would really help her to bear it, so he was not going to grudge her all she could get from it.

"I know, Bess," said he. "Perhaps I was wrong. However, I didn't see quite what else to do. And I never imagined anything so sudden as this. Poor Jim!"

But it was only an easement, to be used and discarded. Miss Caldecott was ready to surrender the point—certainly wouldn't rub it in. "P-perhaps you *were* right, after all!" said she. Her grief for Lizarann was very real. And how was she to tell Phœbe and Joan?

"You may trust me to do whatever can be done for poor Jim, Bess. I shall go to him at the Well at once. He won't be absolutely unprepared by the time I tell him, because he knows my foot on the road a long way off, and he will know something has

happened by my coming so early. It's not half-past eight yet. I shall be with him soon after nine."

"Won't he think you're bringing her with you? She was to have come here first, you know. That was the arrangement."

"Oh no! He never used to expect her till he heard her call, 'Pilot.' You know?"

"Oh, I know! Poor little Lizarann!"

And all those weary hours of the watchers by the bedside of his dying child, Jim had slept sound, treasuring in the heart of his dreams the inheritance of that last lucky memory of overnight. Old David's tale of how he was condemned in boyhood, to live after all into his hundredth year, stayed by Jim as a pledge of a sure Lizarann in the days to come—a very sure one in that St. Augustin's summer that was all but due now. Jim had slept sound, and the story does not grudge him his sweet delusions. The heart-tonic of that false diagnosis of eighty years ago took a variety of dream-forms before the morning, but never lost its savour. By turns it would be a thing and an incident. Jim had hardly time to appreciate the draught of nectar it became, when it had changed, even as it touched his lips, to a triumphant arrival in a glorious port, after stormy seas, with a wreck in tow, called the Lizarann. Jim would fain have kept that dream, to see that wreck refitted ready for sea. But then of a sudden, the wreck was no wreck, but a tree, and Lizarann was up in the tree. And Jim was just thinking now that he would see what Lizarann was really like, without any wonderment why she was never visible before, when the tree changed its identity and became old David himself, or his story; Jim was not clear which. But through these dreams, and others, the interwoven warmth of joy was always the same—the reinforced hope the old chap's yarn had left behind.

Nevertheless, when Jim woke he found it hard to remember where on 'arth he was; and didn't remember, at first. But he knew that when he did it would be nice. And so it was. It was old Margy's cottage, and Lizarann was coming back to it. Jim noticed that everything said so to him. A voluble hen, however anxious she was he should know about her egg, made frequent reference to Lizarann's return. A blackbird conversed with a family of wrens about it, and a linnet endorsed their view, that Lizarann was certainly coming back. A herd of cows, going leisurely to pasture, lowed a great deal about it, and repeated to each other again and again, "Lizarann is coming back," as they died away in the distance musically. And Jim knew that, far afield, a

thousand larks were all of a tale, above the shorn crops in the blue heaven, telling each other Lizarann was on the road—was coming back once more to her Daddy. His little dog especially was clear about it, but was also clear that it would never do to neglect official obligations, and dragged Jim to the well-head with all his wonted enthusiasm. He was perfectly competent to give due notice of her arrival, but business was business.

The essentials of Jim's breakfast, arranged overnight, scarcely brought him in contact with human converse, because the very little girl, who came with milk, and took ba'ack t'yoother joog, was so absorbed in her task as to be able to think of nothing else, and speechless. Besides, she had misgivings that the little dog wanted her blood, and made her visit as short as possible. But when Jim arrived at his well-head, he soon got a chance to speak of his hopes to a fellow-creature, although it was a young one—too young to talk the matter out with. It was not always easy to identify these youngsters, as they made no allowance for blindness; only nodding affirmatives when asked their names right. Jim had to impute wrong names, and provoke corrections.

"You're little Billy Lathrop, young man, I take it?"

"No-ah be-ant. Oy be Ma-atthew Ree-ad doon th' la-an—two dower off Lathrop's."

"I reckoned you might be. It's your brother Jack I've to thank for the loan of this young tyke. He'll be wanting to see him back. Suppose you was to tell him he may have him back to-morrow. Or next day at farthest. A smart young character like you can begin larnin' to carry messages."

"Oy'll tell un."

"Because Lizarann's coming back—that's what you've got to tell. *Who* is it's a-coming back, hey?"

"L'woyzara-ann."

"My little maid, d'ye see?"

"Yower little may-ud."

"That's a likely young customer. Now mind you tell your brother Jack just that and nothing else, Matthew Read." And Matthew Read departed with his pails, leaving Jim all the happier for having, as it were, substantialized and filled out his hopes by this little performance.

The pipe Jim lighted with a vesuvian after discharging a few more water-claims, now and then recurring to the subject nearest his heart with the more talkworthy claimants, was as happy a pipe as he had ever smoked. As the sun rose higher, a full-blooded southern Phœbus with no stint of heat in his veins, he could rejoice

in the evident influence of this mysterious St. Augustin, of whom he had never heard before, but who clearly could make a summer for him and his little lass. It was coming, and so was she. She would not, maybe, be her old self for a bit. But, then, no more had old David been. And that was eighty-four years ago—over half a century before Jim was born! Any number of glorious expectations might entrench themselves behind such a precedent—making a fortress in his soul against Despair.

Who says tobacco cannot be enjoyed in the dark? Jim had heard that story, and thought to himself as he cleared his pipe of ashes that he could tell another tale. But what was that pipe to the pipes he would smoke when his little lass was back, to make all this caution in lighting them needless? It was as good as having eyes himself to have the child beside him. But suppose now he had been blind from birth! Think of what it would have been like to have never a tale to tell to his little lass! He had so lost himself in his love for the child that this little bit of optimism came spontaneously, without a shade of bitter comment about being thankful for small mercies.

It was curious to him now—admittedly so—that he had shrunk from hearing again the sound of the waves, seeing he was actually looking forward to hearing Lizarann tell of them. It was on one account a disappointment to him, that since she was taken away to Chalk Cliff the weather had been so calm. It was true that the one letter she had written him—just at the time of that slight fluctuation upwards in the first week of her stay—had told of a rough sea, with such big waves; but then it had told also of how a pleasure-boat had been shoved off and a lady got wet through. Would that rough sea help him to tell her, better than before, what the waves were like when he was on that steamer in the China seas, and a typhoon swept the decks clear?

Talking was going on, down the road. Somebody was referring to the Rectory, speaking of it as the parsonage. Jim listened. Pa'arson had coom whoam yesterday. That was all right, but had no one else come to the Rectory? Yesterday was exactly six weeks and a day since Lizarann's departure. But Jim had hedged against despair with constant self-reminders that her not having come need mean nothing. So he could ask questions, equably.

"News of th' Master, belike, Jarge?" He affected great ease of speech—a chatty nonchalance—as he awaited the arrival of the voice he had recognized at the road-end of the avenue to his Well. He had stumped along it quick, though, for a wooden leg and a stick.

"Nowt amiss has gotten t' Maister," said the bee-tender, taking time. "Not for to reach *my* ears, this marn'n."

"Thought I heard some guess-chap give him his name, Jarge. Yonder along, a good cast down the road. Who might you have been talking to?"

"Po-ast."

"Ah!—and what said the Post?"

Jarge took more time, during which Jim urged him to fix his mind firmly on the Rector. Jarge had understood that the Rector had come home, and that the Post's son had just gone off to him with a telegram when the Post left home. This was as much as Jarge could be expected to know all at once, outside bee-craft; so Jim spared him further catechism. "Thank 'ee kindly, Jarge!" said he. "What o'clock might you make it?" Jarge made it a qwoo-aater to eight-yut by th' soon, and Jim thanked him again, and stumped back to the well-head.

In his sanguine mood, he took a rose-coloured view of that telegram. Lizarann and Teacher had not come back yet, but it heralded their coming. Why!—what else could it be, unless it was no consarn of his, anyhow? He lit another pipe, and gave himself to happy anticipations; for the influence of old David's early experience was strong on him. Being alone, he talked to his little dog, to whom he could speak freely; for with his keen hearing he could be sure he was alone, even if the young pup's quiescence had been no proof. It wouldn't be but a day, or two at most—so Jim told that pup—before Jack Read could reclaim his property; if, indeed, he hadn't got a better little tyke by now, as very like was the case; a superior article altogether, to whom Keating was unknown, and who especially never ran after chickens. However, it wouldn't do to make too sure, because maybe the little lass wouldn't, just yet awhile, be allowed out by the doctor on cold mornings, in which case things would have to remain as they were for a bit of time. But a day would come when little tykes would be superfluities, and Jack Read might have this one back, and see what he could do towards larning him better manners in the house. The object of these remarks misconceived the drift of them altogether, and, taking them for recognition of his own merits, heaved a sigh over the shortcomings of other little dogs, and fell asleep in the sun.

Jim sat again alone and smoked, and listened to the growing sounds of the day, the insect life stirring in the sunshine, the birds that meant to sing the summer out; growing fewer now, but revived by St. Augustin, evidently. He could hear, at the inter-

val of each new furrow, the team of horses in an old-world plough swing round; and the ploughman's voice, now near and clear, now at the far hedge of his field, and dim. Somewhere a long way off a threshing-machine was droning, and as the sound of it came and went, and rose and fell with the wind, Jim thought of his little lass; and how that one letter of hers old Margy had re-read to him so often had told how she had heard the sea sound so through the night, now more, now less. If she had not come back to the Rectory yesterday, as he hoped, was she up now and out on the beach? . . . but no—hardly! It was barely eight o'clock. Yes—there went the church-bells! But he could not count the strokes for the noise some hedge-sparrows made suddenly, almost close to his ear.

That was a harvest cart with a many horses, Jim supposed, and every horse with bells. Going to load up, at a guess; for it was soon gone by, and its bells a memory. Then another sound of wheels stole in, and grew. Not a cart; carts rattle. Some sort of carriage, coming from Furnival Station. Not indigenous to this village; Jim had learned every native wheel by heart. Not a very dashing carriage neither! It went slow, and the horse seemed to think of every step. A hired fly from the station, of course! Why didn't Jim spot that before?

Now, suppose it had been eight in the evening, it might have been Teacher bringing Lizarann from the station. At this time in the morning ridiculous, of course! Still, the thought was nice.

That fly had pulled up on the road, and not so far off. Jim could hear interchanges between the driver and his fare, evidently male and English. Did Jim know that voice?

"All right—pull up here! I'll get down and walk the rest of the way. How far is it?"

"For to step it afut? Twenty minutes, easy."

"Which does 'easy' mean?"

"Easy for time, mister. You'll have to be a bit brisk to do it in twenty minutes. Give you twenty-three, to do it without idlin'."

A foot on the road, a coach-door that wouldn't hasp, a discovery that the driver has only one and elevenpence change for half-a-sovereign, and then the half-sovereign is on its way back to Furnival, and the fare has started on his twenty-three minutes' walk, with some of the change in his pocket. But he is not going to do it without idling, it seems.

Jim heard him approach the well-gap, and come to a stand. Then he turned up the brick pathway. Now, who was this chap going to be?

"Well, Jim Coupland! Where's Lizarann? I've come to pay her a visit. And you too!"

Jim knew Challis again the moment he heard his voice close. "Aha!" he exclaimed joyfully. "You're the gentleman. Came with the Master nigh a month agone!" And the cordiality of Blind Samson's big right hand was all the greater that it was welcoming, not only a friend, but what was in a sense the dawn of Lizarann. For this gentleman, whose name had slipped Jim's memory, would never have asked for her on insufficient grounds. In a flash of his mind, Jim had inferred that his visitor, on his way to the Rectory, had decided—from information received—that his lassie, due there the day before, would be, or might be, already with her father at the Abbey Well. A very reasonable view! It was almost an assurance that his child had arrived, that this gentleman should speak of her thus.

Challis left his hand in Jim's, while he said, "But where's the kid?"

Said Jim, with confidence, "If you'd come another half-hour later, I lay you'd have found her, back with her Daddy. Six martal weeks she's been away. But you'll find her at the Master's, I take it, or meet on the road."

Challis's voice hung fire a little as he answered, "I'm not on my way to the Rectory now. I shall have to pay my respects to Miss Coupland later. Jolly glad she's back, though, Jim, for your sake! How's she coming on? All the better for the sea, I'll answer for it." Jim was not the one to be behindhand in optimism. "Done her a warld o' good, I'm told! Only, ye see, I haven't set eyes on the Master this week past, and I have to put my dependence on the two little ladies, seeing the old mother at the cottage has gone to London."

At this point Jim saw his way to still further flattering his certainty of Lizarann's return by sending a message about her to his sister, so he let Aunt Stingy into the conversation provisionally. He worded a *couleur de rose* account of his invalid, subject to reserves, and asked Challis to be the bearer of it.

"What's that, Jim? . . . Ah, to be sure; I had forgotten that. Mrs. Steptoe's your sister. Yes—I'll tell her." His manner was unsettled, tense, *exalté*, but not that of a man preoccupied with any but pleasant thoughts. Jim felt that some inquiry after this relative of his would not be out of place. He hoped she was giving satisfaction to "the mistress," and half suggested that her cooking was what he was asking about. His shrewd hearing detected discomfort in Challis's reply: "Oh aye—yes! Very good

wholesome cooking!" Had he touched a sore subject? He decided that he had, and was sorry when the gentleman said abruptly: "That's all right enough. Can't stop now! Got to get to the Park Gate by nine. How far do you make it out to the Park Gate?" Jim gave what information he had to give; but Challis remembered quite enough of the ground to know that the fly-driver's estimate was a low one; in fact, it had been the interest of the latter to minimize the distance, in order to get away as soon as he could. "I shall have to look alive," said Challis. He shook Jim's hand cordially, and started.

In the accident of passing words it had so chanced that if either of these two men had been asked—how came he to know that Lizarann had returned to the Rectory?—he would have referred to the other as an authority. Challis's confidence that he would find Lizarann at the Well was only the echo of some words of the Rector's three weeks previously, fixing the date of her return; while Jim's assurance that she was at the Rectory was based on Challis's way of taking her presence at the Well for granted. Certainly when they parted, each had an image in his mind of the invalid back again, much improved, and looking forward to her meeting with her Daddy.

Such serene unconsciousness of the truth as Jim's was at this moment strikes harshly on one's sense of probability; but, probable or no, it was actual. Jim had not experienced such happiness since his child left him to live, during her absence, on hopes of her return in renewed health. She was coming now; not a doubt of it! She was actually near at hand; so near that, with a guide, he could almost have walked the distance on his wooden leg. She was coming. . . .

Then a gust of disbelief that anything so good could be his, so soon, seized on his faculties, and made his judgment dizzy. He must be silent and patient, and wait.

But with this added assurance of Lizarann, pending or near at hand, Time got a quality of tediousness. The half-hour that followed on Challis's invasion seemed longer than all the previous half-hours of the morning added together. Till then Jim had been making all allowance for the chance that Lizarann was not due till to-morrow, or even next day. The question was an open one. Challis had managed to leave behind him an implication that she had arrived. How the sluggard minutes would crawl now, till she came! Well—patience!

Why was the gentleman going to the Park, not the Rectory? Pending Lizarann, Jim thought it worth while to wonder at this;

or, indeed, at any other trifle that would hold his mind for a moment, and help his patience. He had hardly noticed Challis's *distrait* manner at the time, but it came back to him now. Yes—why was the gentleman not going to the Rectory? Of course, he was only known to him as a guest there; might have been a perfect stranger at the Hall, for anything that appeared to the contrary. But it was the way he had disclaimed the Rectory that clashed with Jim's slight knowledge of him. "Not on his way" there now! "However, it was no concern of Jim's, anyhow! Think of Lizarann again—only Lizarann!"

His mind ran back to the old match-selling days in Bladen Street. There was the terrible January night again, no darker than his day was now, for all he felt St. Augustin's sun on his hands and face; for all he knew at a guess how the white road would have glared on the eyes he had lost, even as his last memory of daylight blazed on them still, leagues away in Africa. There was he again!—a spot in the darkness that was his lot for ever; a something made of sick torture, borne in a litter; and then the voice of his little lass, and the touch of her lips as he lay. . . . Well!—at least he had a man's heart in him then, and, crushed as he was, made light of his agony, to spare her. That was a consolation to him now.

His lot for ever! His lot, that is, so long as he himself should live to bear it. His lot, till what was left of what was once a man was laid by what once was Dolly, in a grave! Then touch and hearing would be gone too, and he and Dolly alike forgotten in the black void of the time to come. . . . What did *he* matter? He flung the unconsidered unit, himself, aside, in view of a new terror that came suddenly—an image of his little lass without her Daddy. That was too much pain to bear. To think of the lassie left alone!

But why think of it at all, yet awhile? Might not he see her again within the hour? Was it not a chance that even now she was on her way, coming——coming? . . .

What was that? A dog's bark he knew quite well—the Rector's dog—somewhere over by the Rifle Butts. Near a mile off—yes!—but clear to the sharpened hearing of a blind man. Equally clear to his dog too, asleep in the sun, and calling for prompt action. The little tyke started up, barking in reply, and scoured away to make his presence felt elsewhere. Jim's thought stopped, that he might listen for a distant step on the road, a step he knew well. A great swinging stride unlike any other man's in those parts—how mistake it? But another quarter of an hour must pass before

either could have articulate speech of the other, mere shouting apart. Jim was just on the very verge of his release from suspense, and could not bear to wait a moment longer, patience or no! He started along the paved way that led to the road, guiding himself, as he could well do, by touching the curb with his stick. It was all plain sailing to him, so far, and no guide was needed.

He stood and listened, waiting for the approaching footsteps. He could hear his own little deserter's bark, no great distance down the road; and through it, at intervals, the bark of the other dog, coming slowly nearer. But otherwise, nothing outside the sum of noises he could know the day by from the night, a monotone with here and there a special sound of beast or bird or insect. Yes!—there was another sound, some way off still; the motor-car that had passed the cottage last night, coming from the Hall. Jim knew its special hoot of old; could have sworn to it among a dozen others.

An old turf-cutter was near enough to see Jim at this moment, and, after, told what he saw. This man was some way off, trimming the roadside turf; but his eyes were good, though he was deaf as any post.

He saw Jim—so his tale ran—standing where the path began, close against the road. He seemed to be listening for something. Quite unexpectedly he saw him throw up his arms as though surprised or delighted; but of this the old man, hearing nothing, could not speak with certainty. He had somehow an impression, though, that Jim was "raising a great shouting." Then he saw him step suddenly into the road, and limp with his stick, but with wonderful activity, towards the twist in its course that it makes round the clump of thorn-trees that shuts in the Abbey Well. The old turf-cutter saw him last just as he turned that corner.

Immediately after, a motor-car, going at a mad speed, tore along the road from the Park. Whether this car was sounding its trumpet the deaf man could not say. All he knew was that it followed without slacking down round the corner Jim had been last seen at. It vanished in a thick cloud of its own dust. The deaf man "misdoubted something had gone wrong," not from any noise, of course, but because he "watched along the road" for the dust-cloud, and none came. He suspected nothing, however, beyond some hitch in the car's working-gear, until some ten minutes later, when the motor came back, slowly—or relatively slowly. Then he saw that it contained a young lady, who looked, he said, "all mazed and staring like"; a gentleman, who lay back with blood running down his face, and seemed "no ways better than

dead," and the chauffeur. Then a little dog came barking down the road, and went after the motor-car. He could see it was barking. That was all he could tell. He laid his turf-spud aside, and went along the road to find Jim and learn what he could of the mishap.

Athelstan Taylor left the Rectory, with a heavy heart, shortly before nine o'clock. He knew he should find Jim at the Abbey Well, and he wanted to make sure the news should not reach him through any other channel. It would inevitably leak out now. He knew well how things of the kind will travel, contrary to all calculations.

It occurred to him just as he was starting that if he took his dog with him, Jim's prevision of something wrong, which he looked to as likely to make his task easier, would have time to mature before his arrival. Jim would hear the dog's bark, and recognize it, long before his own footsteps could reach his ears. He had not at first intended to have the animal with him, but he now went back and released him, and felt that the idea was a good one. He could cover the ground, going by the short-cut near the Rifle Butts, in less than half-an-hour. He might be hindered on the way, but at least he would be as quick as he could. No one should be beforehand with Jim, if he could help it.

The hindrances were few and slight. Two or three colloquies of as many minutes each, ending with apologies for their brevity, made up the total of delay. Twenty-five minutes may have passed since Challis left Jim to keep his appointment, when the Rector reached the Rifle Butts and took the path that goes across from them to the Abbey Well; it branches off from the path Lizarann and Joan followed to go to the cottage.

What ensued does not explain itself, unless it is made quite clear that the curve in the road round the Abbey Well was no mere kink, but a full curve, like the letter U. One side of this U looked towards the Hall, the other to the village; and beyond it the turning for Thanes Castle, along which the motor-car came last night. The point to keep in mind is that the entrance to the Abbey Well gave towards the Hall, not the village. Nevertheless, the Well was visible from the Rifle Butts through a gap in the trees, which grew thicker on each side of the curve of the road, concealing a portion of it very completely. It was into this the motor-car vanished from the eyes of the deaf turf-cutter.

Athelstan Taylor, half broken-hearted as he thought of the task before him, had a struggle with himself not to flinch from it, and

slacken the speed that was bringing it so near. He could see, shortly after passing the Rifle Butts, the figure of Lizarann's Daddy, and could picture to himself his unsuspicious ignorance. How sick he felt! How glad he would be when it was over!

He saw Jim rise from his seat and make for the entrance, and conjectured that his own footstep was the cause. He saw him stop and wait when he reached the road, and then lost sight of the entry for a moment. But he thought he heard Jim shout, as he had heard him often shout before now, in answer to little Lizarann's call of "Pilot." When he next saw the entry there was no Jim.

He had to go only the length of the curve to get to the place where he saw Jim last. He was within five minutes of it now. Courage!

That was the motor-car from the Hall making that hideous noise. Louis Rossier, the chauffeur, going by himself, of course! He always broke out of bounds when alone, and that speed was something awful. The Felixthorpes must have stayed at Thanes. Bess had said they were there; and now M. Louis was going to fetch them. Would he never slacken down at that bend in the road? Apparently not. A terrible corner that, to whirl a motor round at sixty miles an hour! He could hear Jim's little dog bark in answer to his own, but he was still some minutes' walk from the road. . . .

What was that cry? What were those cries, rather—cries of panic or of warning, with a woman's shriek above them? And what was that terrible cry in a voice he knew?—Jim's voice!

Then he was conscious, in spite of distance, of rapid, panic-stricken interchange of speech. Two voices, a man's and a woman's, mixed with the pulsations of the shut-off machinery of the car, checked in its course. Then of alternations of the sounds of the working-gear, which he knew meant the turning of the car in the narrow space. Then, as he reached the spot, the sound of its resumed movement, and its trumpet-signal again. When he arrived it was vanishing, but he took little heed of it or its contents. All his thought was for the man who lay, crushed and groaning, on the bare road in the sun. Would his message need to be given now?

"Twice over's soon told, Master, and there an end!" Those seemed to be Jim's words to the man who kneeled over him, not daring to touch him yet till he should know more. Should he examine him where he lay, or try at once to move him off the road?

"Oh, Jim—Jim Coupland—who has done this?" He raised the head that lay in the dust with cautious strength, fearing that any touch might only be so much more needless pain. But there was no appearance of flinching; and he raised him further yet, to rest against his knee; then carefully wiped the forehead, red with blood from a cut on the temple, but still there was no sign of flinching from his touch. "Can you bear to be lifted, Jim? . . . Say if I hurt you."

"Ah!—get me up out of the gangway. I'm a job for the doctor, I take it. . . ." His voice became inaudible, but not before the word "Water!" had passed his lips. The old turf-cutter was coming slowly. If he could be raised and moved to a safe place by the roadside, for the moment, further help could be got. The Rector knew the old man would not hear if he spoke at his loudest, but he contrived to make him understand. Between them they raised poor Jim gently, and got him out of the blazing sun. His fortitude was great to utter no sound—or, was he injured to death, and half insensible? The Rector recalled what he had heard of him in that old accident, and thought the former.

No, he was not insensible! For when they had laid him on some soft bracken a little way off the road, and the old man had gone for assistance to the nearest cottage—for he himself did not dare to leave him—Jim tried again to speak.

"What, Jim? Say it again!" The Rector put his ear close to catch the words.

"Make the best of me, and let my lassie come!" He was wandering, clearly. But it was easy to see his meaning—that he wished to seem as little hurt as might be to his child, whom he imagined near at hand. Easier still when he added, "She came afore. Let her come now!"

"Lizarann is not here now, Jim." The speaker's voice half choked him. But why was this worse than the other telling would have been?

He was speaking again. It was only repetition. "She came afore. Let her come now!" His voice was all but inaudible, and the Rector's words had been lost upon him.

The deaf old man had done his errand well. The daughter of the little roadside inn, quicker of foot than he, came bringing water, and, what was needed too, brandy. Speech came again after a mouthful, swallowed with difficulty.

"Am I a bad sight, master? Let the lassie come! Never you fear for her! She's used to her Daddy." He spoke so naturally,

all allowance made for pain resolutely kept at bay, that his only hearer—for the girl from the inn heard nothing—was quite at a loss. A bald truth was safe for the moment, though.

"Lizarann is not here, Jim. She cannot come to you now." The last words almost said why as well! Then both Jim's hearers heard what came quite distinctly from his lips: "What's got the lassie, Master, my lassie? I tell ye, I heard her sing out 'Pi-lot!' Aye!—once and again, 'Pi-lot!' when you was coming across the common yonder!"

But whether he himself heard the only reply Athelstan Taylor could force his lips to—"Not with me, Jim; Lizarann was not with me"—no one ever knew. For all he said was, "My little lass!" and never spoke again.

His shattered body was carried to old Margy's cottage, but the moment of death was hard to determine. All that came to light from the post-mortem examination was that the spine was injured beyond all hope of recovery, and that this was only one of several injuries, any of which might have caused death.

The windows of the ward at the Nursing Home at Chalk Cliff stand wide to allow the sweet air from the sea to come and go at will. All has been done that Death has left to do for Lizarann Coupland. Her end and its cause are certified by medical authority, and registered officially, and a little coffin has been ordered, in which the tiny white thing, like an image well carved in alabaster, that Adeline Fossett and her friend Miss Jane know is under that sheet on the bed, is to be interred shortly, as soon as its Daddy's wishes are known. They never will be, but neither lady knows that yet.

"Poor little darling!" said Miss Fossett. "Do you recollect, Jane, those very last words she said?"

"About the Pilot?"

"No, no—after that. I wasn't sure you heard. I had tried to tell her what . . . what it was . . . and I couldn't find words. But I fancy the little thing half understood, too. What she said was—quite clearly—'But who's a-going to tell my Daddy?'" It was so like herself. The speaker breaks down; but then, you see, she had taken Lizarann to her heart so thoroughly—was thinking she would never have another child she should be so fond of. Miss Jane is used to these things, and affects strength.

"I think it will be ready for the flowers now," she says, and removes that sheet. Yes, the handkerchief round the face may

come away. The two ladies place flowers round the little alabaster head. It is the head, one would say, of a sweet little girl, and the mouth is not too large for beauty now, although that line of black is in the lips.

So it came to pass that neither Lizarann nor her Daddy lived to mourn the loss of the other. The child was never an orphan, and the father only childless an hour or so. And Lizarann never knew what his employment had been, but cherished to the last an untainted memory of those happy days when she led him home, blind but otherwise uninjured, from the honourable fulfilment of some mysterious public service. And yet, had she known, would she have have thought it other than right? For, was it not Daddy?

CHAPTER XLIX

JUDITH'S VAGARIES. HOW SHE BROUGHT SIR ALFRED CHALLIS, INSENSIBLE, TO ROYD HALL IN A MOTOR. A MESSAGE PER MR. BROWNRIGG TO THE RECTOR. HOW TO PROBE THE MYSTERY. JUDITH'S RESERVE. PUBLIC IMPATIENCE. THE CHAUFFEUR'S TESTIMONY

ROYD HALL was at its quietest that morning when the young man Samuel answered the bell from his master's bedroom, and found the Baronet still in bed, at a few minutes after nine. The old gentleman must have dozed off again after ringing it, because Samuel had to knock twice before he said "Come in."

"I thought you rang, sir," said Samuel.

"I did ring. Who was that went away in the motor five minutes ago?"

Samuel was not going to admit that the motor had been gone a full quarter of an hour. It would have been disrespectful to suggest that his master had been asleep unawares, so he accepted the five-minute estimate. "I believe it was Miss Judith, sir; but I couldn't say, to be certain."

"Just ask. What o'clock is it?"

"It's gone nine, some minutes, sir."

"This coffee's cold . . . never mind! . . . I suppose I went to sleep again. . . . Oh, Samuel! . . ." Samuel, departing, paused. "See that the cold douche *is* cold. It was neither one thing nor the other yesterday."

"Sure to be cold, sir, now! Because both the other gentlemen's run it on." To those acquainted with the heating gear of bathrooms the way the old supply proves lukewarm, and nothing bracing comes to pass, is well known. The Baronet referred to it again as he met Samuel returning on his way to the bath. Was he sure it was cold? Yes, Samuel was; and that *was* Miss Judith, he found, that had gone off in the motor, after breakfasting early in her own room. As witness Mr. Elphinstone and Miss Judith's maid Tilley.

Sir Murgatroyd never wondered much at anything his family did. He had a beautiful faith that everything was all right always, and asked few or no questions. Still, he would wonder a little, tentatively, at rare intervals. Only he strained at gnats and

swallowed camels. This time he swallowed the camel of Judith's early departure after a solitary breakfast. That was all right—it was some appointment with the Duchess, "or something." But he strained at the gnat of her having left her little attendant behind. He had a superstition that the absence of any two persons, known to be together, was never a thing to cause anxiety; but he was liable to fidgeting about any of his family unaccounted for, if he supposed them to be alone. There may be other people like him.

It was this superstition that caused Sir Murgatroyd to say to Lady Arkroyd—through a door between their rooms that he opened on purpose, having become aware of the departure of her ladyship's maid—"What has Judith gone out so early for?" To which the reply was: "You must speak plainer. I can't hear you while you shave." For during shaving the shaver's attention cannot be fully given to speech, owing to the interdependence of razor, eye, and jaw in a delicate relation to one another, to say nothing of the care needed to preserve a soapless mouth.

So Sir Murgatroyd wound up his shave before he spoke again, adding to his first question the words, "In the motor."

"How do you know she went in the motor?"

"Samuel said so. Besides, I heard it go."

"I suppose I was asleep. . . . Oh no!—I can't account for Judith's vagaries. She goes her own way. I suppose she's taken the child with her—her maid, I mean?"

"Why, no, she hasn't! That's just it. . . ."

"I didn't mean that. I meant that if she hadn't, Cintilla would know." That is to say, her ladyship washed her hands of any complicity in the Bart.'s superstition spoken of above. She always, in talking of her husband, to the Duchess for instance, affected a Spartan stolidity; saying that no one who did not know him as she did would ever suspect Murgatroyd of being such an hysterical character.

Nevertheless, she felt curiosity about Judith, and bade Mrs. Cream, her own lady's-maid, summon Cintilla to give evidence. Only first she closed the door into her husband's room, not to be open to any imputation of hysteria. The Baronet accepted his exclusion the more readily that he had just rung for Samuel. For his relation towards that young man, who was officially his valet, was that he allowed him to help him on with his coat as soon as he himself was otherwise complete. He had to, or Samuel wouldn't have been his valet.

It was nearly a quarter to ten when her ladyship said to her

son-in-law and Mr. Brownrigg, the only guest outside the family, that we were frightfully late at breakfast. She said it on the long terrace the breakfast-room opens on, where the two gentlemen had been for some time wondering whether they were to have any. A peacock shrieked a condemnation of late breakfast; and the Baronet, appearing last, took the sins of the congregation on his shoulders. His lateness eclipsed all previous lateness.

But he must needs make matters worse; for after communications about Sibyl, and record of her husband's conviction that that young lady would pay attention to her medical adviser, and not appear at breakfast, he inquired about Judith's escapade, as a Baronet inquires when he really wants to know, not as mere passing chat. To which her ladyship replied, as one whose patience is tried by an inopportune husband: "There, my dear, Judith is all right if you'll only leave her alone. I know *all* about her. She's gone to go somewhere with Thyringia, and won't be back till I don't know when. Now don't hinder, and do let's have breakfast. . . . No, Elphinstone, don't sound the gong on my account. We's all here. I do hate that banging." For her husband, the fidget, had suggested absurdly that perhaps Judith was back, and didn't know breakfast was ready. "Besides, she *had* breakfasted, anyhow!" adds her ladyship.

Lord Felixthorpe has a word of illumination for the Baronet, who acquiesced in the will of a senior officer. It causes him to recur to the subject again, saying, "Frank says Judith asked for the car yesterday . . ." and to be again extinguished with an impatient, "My *dear!—do* you suppose I don't know all about it?" from her ladyship.

When that scanty gathering of four persons sat down to breakfast at the table where last year this story told of so large an assemblage, Royd Park and mansion alike seemed a haven of serenest peace, sheltered from impact with the outer world, and unconscious of its turmoil. Every sound of living creatures was as good as silence—articulate with its denials of discord. Even the peacock's screech upon the lawn fell in with the music of the wood-doves in the beech-woods—just a high staccato note; no more!—and the gobble of a turkey from the stable-yard, across the big red wall there, was modulated to its place as an instrument the composer should not use too freely, though full of spirit. A million undertones of insects; a perspective of scattered voices afar, each fainter than the last; the sound of the manger-chain of a horse in the groom's hands—all agreed that whatever that

railway-whistle might mean about the world a league and more away, here in this sacred enclosure was peace—peace guaranteed by a bygone peace of vanished years, and a security of entail. Peace without end, Amen!

So much so that when the motor-trumpet was suddenly audible, but unmistakably, beyond the Park Gate on the road from the village, each of the four at breakfast looked at some other, and said—there it was! But they were undisturbed in their minds, and gave various consideration to Yorkshire ham and filleted plaice and potted beef and Keiller, and all that one associates with clean damask and steaming urns. The Baronet only said, with apparent sense of relief: "I thought she could hardly have gone for the whole day." To which his wife replied: "Oh, my dear, how funny you are! Don't you know Judith?" And then they talked current topics of the day—Raisuli and Employer's Liability.

The motor-trumpet close at hand, and wheels! Now we shall know. But not so soon that we need leave Morocco for a moment. And Mr. Brownrigg will take half a cup more coffee.

What is that, Elphinstone? May Mr. Elphinstone speak to her ladyship? He may; so he does, in an undertone. Her ladyship says, "I'll come," and then to Mr. Brownrigg, "The milk's beside you," and follows the butler from the room. All the three men look at each other. "Something wrong!" says Lord Felixthorpe. He and the Baronet look the inquiry at one another, "Ought we not to follow?" and both answer, "Yes!" at once, aloud. Mr. Brownrigg neglects his coffee and follows, looking concerned and apprehensive.

There is a lobby between the dining-room and the entrance-hall to the house, and her ladyship meets them in it, returning. She says to her husband: "Oh, my dear!—you will have to come about this." She is looking ashy white, and when she has spoken sinks down on a wall-seat in a recess, saying: "Oh dear! Do go out and see." She is quite overcome by something.

A new identity comes suddenly on Sir Murgatroyd. "See to her, Frank," he says. "Is Mrs. Cream there—yes?—See to your mistress, Cream." And goes out.

The butler is just beyond the lobby, and the firm voice of the Baronet is audible above his terrified undertone. "*Who* is it? . . . Sir Alfred Challis? . . . Badly?" The speaker then passes out of hearing, going to the entrance-hall.

Mrs. Cream has come, and finds that her mistress has not fainted away, though not far short of it. Her ladyship rallies, saying to her son-in-law: "Never mind me, Frank!" Whereupon Lord

Felixthorpe says: "You'll excuse me, Brownrigg, but I *must* see to my wife. She'll be frightened if I don't." And goes three steps at a time up a side-staircase, leaving Mr. Brownrigg embarrassed, and feeling in the way.

When Sir Murgatroyd set foot outside his house, the first thing he saw was the face of his daughter, still seated in the car, supporting the head of the man who was with her, but shrinking from it, covered as it was with some shawl or cloth, in terror. The first words he heard, above the drumming beat of the stationary car's machinery and the hysterical excitement of the chauffeur, dismounted from his seat, were a relief to him. His daughter, at any rate, was uninjured, or only shaken at the worst. "I am not the least hurt," she said, with perfect self-command, though in a bewildered, stony way. Her dress was not soiled or seriously disordered, so she could not have been thrown from the car.

His hearers at first thought M. Louis incoherent. "C'était la faute de ce sacré aveugle—qui m'y trouvera à redire—moi? Qu'ai-je pu faire, moi?—c'est l'arbre du frein qui m'a trompé. J'ai tiré la manivelle—oui!—et elle m'a trompé. Peste soit de cet aveugle. . . ." And so on. He was understood by no one.

"Get this man out of the way; he's no use. Where's Bullett?" Thus the Baronet. "Now, Elphinstone, get that deck-chair—the long one, you know—look sharp about it!" Elphinstone departed, as Bullett, the model groom, came running. "The roan, in the dogcart," said his master; and then: "Yes, my dear, you shall tell me directly." For Judith was beginning: "It has not been my fault. . . ." She was speaking like a woman in a dream, or one half waking from one.

Her father only glanced at the white face with the blood on it, then covered it again. "He might be able to get some brandy down," said he. He stood with his finger on Challis's pulse till it came, and then tried to get him to swallow some, but without success. "We must get him in," he said. "Where's Frank?" Samuel testified that his lordship was just coming downstairs. The fact was that his lordship, although his solicitude for his wife had been appreciated, had been told not to be absurd, but to go away and make himself useful.

He arrived just as the long deck-chair was brought—one such as one sees on passenger boats for India and China—and, assisted in transporting the man who lay absolutely insensible on it to the room he had occupied when he had visited the house as a guest—the room where he missed that postscript of Marianne's, and prob-

ably sowed the seeds of all this mischief. It was easy for three to carry the chair—one on either side and one behind—so the Baronet left it to his son-in-law and Elphinstone and Samuel, and went to speak to Bullett, who had just arrived with the dogcart. On his way, coming from the lobby, he met Mr. Brownrigg, looking horribly shocked.

"Is it Challis?" said that gentleman. The Baronet nodded.

"It's the author," said he. "Is my wife still there?" He pointed to the lobby.

"She has gone upstairs to Lady Felixthorpe, I think. Can I be of any service?"

"A thousand thanks! I don't know of anything. . . . Yes, I do, though. My groom is just going to bring the doctor. Will you ride with him and call at the Rectory?—tell Taylor of this, and get him to come at once. He and Mr. Challis—Sir Alfred Challis I should say—were great friends. He'll come."

"I will go with pleasure," said Mr. Brownrigg. He went with pleasure, evidently. It is, of course, a great satisfaction to be of use in any painful crisis.

Sir Murgatroyd, as he turned to the entrance-door again, met Judith, who was accompanied by her little maid, terrified beyond measure, but behaving well. She gave an inanimate face to her father to kiss, saying collectedly, but in the same stony way: "There really is no occasion for anxiety about me. I am perfectly safe. Only don't ask me to talk about it now." Her father followed her in silence to the door of her room, when she turned and spoke again, after a visible effort that failed. "Is he *killed?*" she said, forcing the word out.

"Oh no!—no, no!—no such thing! Stunned—contused—that sort of thing! I've sent Bullett for Pordage. I should have sent the car, but Monsieur Louis isn't in a state to manage it. There would have been another accident. . . . What?"

"Tell them—mamma and Sibyl—not to disturb me. I will tell you after. . . . No! When the doctor has seen him, tell my little maid here. She will bring me word." And then Judith, whose beauty had lost nothing by the shock she has sustained—if anything, the reverse—vanishes into her room, and her father hears the key in the lock turned significantly. In the old Baronet's look now, roused as he is from his easy-going homeliness, and with a certain resolve growing on him, one sees that that beauty is not inherited from her mother alone. He goes straight to the room where the injured man lies, still insensible and motionless, still with a low pulse that neither gains nor loses. The doctor cannot

be very long, if Bullett finds him at home. His practice is to remain at home in the morning.

"Do you know anything of all this?" Sir Murgatroyd asks the question of his wife and younger daughter in the bedroom of the latter, where he has found them, white and frightened—talking in a nervous undertone, but quickly, and as folk talk who can tell things.

"She *has* been seeing him. Sibyl says so."

"Seeing Challis?"

"Of course. But she hasn't spoken of him to me for a month—quite a month." This was her ladyship.

"I told you it would be no use, *madre*," says Sibyl. "But you wouldn't listen to me."

"My dear—how unreasonable you are! How was it possible for your father and me to allow it to go on? You may say what you like, but he *is* a married man. . . ."

"All I say is, you made matters worse."

"Never mind that now!" said the Baronet. "What I want to hear is—how did Sib know this was going on?"

Sibyl is quite clear on that point. "Judith met him in the Park the day before we came, last month. Old Mrs. Inskip saw them together, behaving like a couple of—like *lovers*." Her tone is one of reprobation and disgust. She goes on to tell how she had interviewed the centenarian on the subject, and been fully enlightened.

"That is all at an end now, anyhow." So says the Baronet, but when his wife says "Why?" he does not answer, but goes on as to another point reflectively. "Judith must have met him on her way to Thanes. . . . Where did he join her—this morning, I mean?"

Both ladies strike a new clue. "Was she going to Thanes at all?" And Sibyl adds: "I don't believe she was."

"You said you *knew* she was, Therèse," says Sir Murgatroyd, addressing his wife by her name—a thing that always means, with him, a definite attitude of some sort. She is on her mettle directly, for expostulation or defence.

"My dear, I never said anything of the sort. She talked yesterday of going to-day, and, of course, I *supposed* she had. That little girl of hers only said she said she might not be back to lunch." Her ladyship exonerates herself at some length, denying what she had said plainly an hour before at breakfast.

Her husband treats the point as an open one, to avoid indefinite

discussion of it. "I see," he says. "It was only your inference. I wonder if that crazy French chap has come to his senses. It's no use my talking to him. I can't understand three words he says." Then, at Sibyl's suggestion, he went away to his son-in-law, who was still with the injured man, to get him to interview the bewildered chauffeur, and see what could be made of his testimony. During Lord Felixthorpe's absence he remained by Challis, still perfectly insensible on the bed, but apparently only stunned, like a man in a deep sleep. He breathed regularly, and though his pulse dragged a little, it was quite steady. Sir Murgatroyd felt only moderate uneasiness about him. He had himself been thrown from his horse in the hunting-field, and remained insensible till next day.

Lord Felixthorpe returned. The chauffeur's account of the thing, now that his mind was more settled, was that, in order to avoid a collision with a man in the road, he had swerved at a sharp corner. Challis started to his feet at the moment, and was thrown over the edge of the car, falling on his head in the road. "Mademoiselle"—so ran M. Louis' testimony—"était terriblement épouvantée, mais elle ne s'est pas évanouie," Lord Felixthorpe translated, for the benefit of the Baronet. "Alors," said M. Louis, "nous avons soulevé le corps, nous deux, dans l'automobile, et Mademoiselle m'a crié—en avant, vite, vite! Et moi, j'ai retourné vite, vite! Qu'est ce qu'on aurait voulu de plus?" Questioned as to where Challis had got into the car, he replied—at the Park Gate; as to what he understood its destination to be, that he did not know anything except that it was about forty miles off, but that Monsieur had a map with the route marked; as to when Miss Arkroyd had requisitioned the car, that she had spoken about it to him overnight. Milord had instructed him that it would not be required during the day, as he himself should *monter à cheval*, and Miladi would remain at home. It was to be at Mademoiselle's disposal, or Miladi Arkroyd's. "Effectivement," said he, in an injured tone. "j'ai suivi mes renseignements, et je ne suis pas à blâmer." His lordship had then explained to him that he need not be so touchy; no one was blaming him. There was another point. Who was the man who caused the car to swerve, and was he hurt? Monsieur Louis replied with the Frenchest of shrugs. "Mais je ne sais pas! Comment voulez-vous que je sache? —quelque vagabond—quelque mendiant!" He turned the conversation to the damage done to a tyre.

Had Lord Felixthorpe heard the chauffeur's words on his first arrival, a suspicion he now felt that M. Louis was keeping some-

thing back would have been greatly strengthened. Sir Murgatroyd may have noticed the discrepancy, but he said nothing at the time. His only remark was, "We shall know more of this soon."

Presently Lord Felixthorpe said: "It certainly does occur to me that my sister-in-law would be able to contribute some valuable information, and I do not understand that she is any the worse for this mishap, fright apart. Why should we not. . . .?" He stopped short; for his father-in-law had touched him with his finger, saying only, "Frank!" The manner of it made him end with, "Why—do you know anything?"

"When was that Bill to go into Committee—the Deceased Wife's Sister—you know?"

"What's to-day? Saturday? It was yesterday, Friday. Why? . . . Do you suppose . . .?"

"It may have something to do with this—mind you, I only say *may* have! . . . I suppose the *Times* has come?"

"I'll see." He went out and spoke to Elphinstone over the great staircase, and returned. "I've told him to bring the papers here."

"Yes—here we are!" said the Baronet, five minutes after, controlling an outspread sheet of last night's Debates. He went on, reading scrapwise: "'Lord Shaftesbury moved amendment to remove from Bill retrospective character . . . very indistinctly heard in gallery . . . no real hardship would be inflicted by amendment . . . persons who had contracted these marriages fully conscious of legal consequences involved' . . . hm-hum!" and so on. "Where's the end of it? . . . oh—here! 'Amendment withdrawn.' Yes, Frank, that may have something to do with it—may have a great deal!"

"I'm not sure that I follow. Has it to do with . . .?" He dropped his voice, and looked towards the motionless figure on the bed.

"Of course it has . . . *he* won't hear—you needn't be uneasy. I was just like that. . . . Well!—we'll talk outside if you like. . . . Yes, look at this, Frank: Prorogation is next Wednesday, when this Bill will receive the Royal Assent, and become law. Until next Wednesday at midday, or thereabouts, Challis's wife isn't his wife, and any woman he marries on Monday or Tuesday is. He couldn't even be convicted of bigamy unless his first marriage was held legal, and that would be rather discourteous to the Royal Assent on Wednesday. *Now* do you see?"

"Surely you never can imagine . . ."

"Well!"

"Surely you never can imagine that Sir Challis and Ju were going to make a runaway match of it, to outwit the action of this Bill . . ."

"I can only see this," says the Baronet: "that if they did not do so, they were losing the only chance they had left of making an honourable match of any sort or kind. Isn't that the doctor?"

It is the footstep of the roan, unmistakable, and the wheels of the dogcart, at speed. It is poor little Lizarann's friend, Dr. Sidrophel. But all his old look has left him—a look as though he was born to be amused, and found his patients diverting—as he comes quickly to Challis's room, meeting the two gentlemen on the way, to whom he speaks very little. He nods once or twice, in reply to a brief abstract of the accident, saying only, "Let's have a look at him!" He finds time to say that the Rector could not come, but would come later. There was a good deal to be done. The Baronet did not seem to understand this.

The household has fought shy of touching an insensible patient, pending a doctor on the way, especially as there is no visible hæmorrhage. The blood from a cut on the temple was not renewed when the face was wiped with a sponge on his first arrival at the house. The doctor makes a very rapid examination. "You wish him to remain here, Sir Murgatroyd?" he says.

"To remain here? Of course I do."

"Then I must have his clothes off first. The cut's nothing on the forehead. That can wait."

The coat must be sacrificed, but it can't be helped. Slit up the sleeves, and off with it! Better than jarring him about in his present state. Once wardrobe-saving is discarded, it is easy work to get the author in trim for a careful overhauling. No bones broken, is the verdict. All the worse! His head took most of his weight, and bore the shock. A broken knee-joint might have spared his brain. As it is, Dr. Pordage seems to think the net volumes may come slower in the future. Besides, you never can tell at first about the spine in cases of this sort.

For the present, concession must be made to treatment. It never does to do absolutely nothing. So let's have mustard and hot water to the feet, and ammonia to the nostrils, and try to get a little brandy down his throat. But quiet is *the* thing. Presently, all that seems feasible has been done, and quiet is to have its opportunity. Still, quite insensible!

Ought not Mrs. Challis, or Lady Challis, whichever she is, to be communicated with? The question is a joint-stock one in which Lady Arkroyd and Sibyl have shares, having come into conference.

Of course, they were not on terms—her ladyship says this—but is that our concern?

"I shouldn't put it on that, Lady Arkroyd," says the doctor. "He'll probably be conscious in a few hours. Better not alarm her needlessly. If he continues unconscious for twenty-four hours . . . why, then we might think about it. But I don't suppose him to be in any danger." The speaker's serious manner, unlike himself, seemed out of keeping with his light estimate of Challis's danger.

"We haven't got her address, so we can't, and there's no use talking about it. Unless Judith knows. Only it seems she's not to be got at." This is Sibyl, not without asperity.

"How *is* Miss Arkroyd?" says the doctor, whose emphasis on the verb means, "I am conscious that I ought to have asked before, and my doing it now is rather a formality." Lady Arkroyd testifies that Judith is in her room lying down, but was all right when she spoke to her through the door—oh yes!—she seemed perfectly right, but had locked herself in, and wanted to be quiet. The Baronet says, to his wife only, "Perhaps we had better leave her alone, Therèse." And Therèse replies, "Oh, I'm sure *I* don't want to meddle with her." Impatience with Miss Arkroyd is in the air. She is credited with being the underlying cause of all this disturbance.

There is a surprise in the bush for her father; only half-informed, so far. For the doctor, departing, pauses and says gravely, hesitatingly: "I believe—but I don't know—that the inquest will be on Monday, or Tuesday."

"*The* inquest!—Why inquest? *What* inquest?" The Baronet is absolutely in the dark about everything but Challis's mishap. His wife, better informed by the groom during the doctor's visit to his patient, touches him on the arm, saying, "My dear, Dr. Pordage is referring to the man . . ." and falters.

"There was a man killed," says Sibyl abruptly. "We supposed you knew."

"A man killed! Good God! I knew nothing. What man?"

Sibyl's husband overhears, and comes quickly. "What is that about a man killed?" he says. He also is completely taken aback.

Then Lady Arkroyd says again, "We thought you knew." And the doctor follows, saying collectedly, "Jim Coupland, the man at the Abbey Well, was struck by the motor-car and killed. The Rector found him lying dead in the road. That is why Mr. Taylor did not accompany me. He will be here shortly, and will tell you more than I can."

Sir Murgatroyd gazes from one to the other, shocked and speechless. Lord Felixthorpe, nearly as much concerned, says below his breath, "That miscreant Rossier never said a word to me of this." But he is preoccupied and ill-at-ease about his wife, who will be none the better just now for upsets and tragic surprises. He persuades her to go back to the quiet of her room, in spite of her protests that he is nonsensical, saying as he goes away with her, "We'll have that French scoundrel up when I come back. I won't be three minutes." But he was a little longer, and when he returned, the doctor, who was wanted elsewhere, was on his way back. He found his father-in-law alone in the library, sitting with his head on his hand, as though completely oppressed and stunned with what he had heard. "Oh, Frank," said the old gentleman, "this is horrible!" He had made sure that the patient upstairs was properly looked to, and had sat down to rest and be quiet until Athelstan Taylor's arrival. But the chauffeur might be sent for.

A female servant, told off to mount guard over the patient, and report any change or movement, had been at her post about a quarter of an hour, when Miss Arkroyd opened the door and came into the room. "Don't go, Hetty," was all she said. She looked as white—so Hetty reported afterwards—as the clean wristband that young woman made use of in illustration. Also, her hair was all coming down. She stood at the bedside maybe a minute, maybe two—Hetty couldn't say—then touched the inanimate hand on the coverlid. "Oh no; she never took hold," said Hetty. "Touched and drew back like!" Then she turned to the girl and said, "Have *you* heard what the doctor said?" rather as if she took scanty information for granted. "But, of course, I could tell her all right," said Hetty, who had been taking notice. "Only she didn't any more than just stop to hear, but went. My word!—she *was* looking bad."

She must have slipped back quietly into her room after this, taking the young girl Cintilla with her. For when her mother, an hour later, after consultation as to the wisdom of the step, went to her door to try again for admission, it was opened by Cintilla, and Judith's voice said, "Oh yes, come in; I want to hear what the doctor said." But her speech was so composed as scarcely to comply with the show of feeling the circumstances demanded, even if the runaway match idea was not a well-grounded one.

M. Rossier did not make a good figure when summoned to appear in the library. He bristled and stood on his defence at once, instead of making, as requested, a simple statement of his version

of the facts. Perhaps Sir Murgatroyd would have done more wisely not to remind a witness under examination that he himself was a Justice of the Peace; it tended to invest him with the character of a *Juge d'Instruction,* and M. Louis with that of "the accused." The latter was as strange to the idea of waiting for a proof of guilt as the former to that of demanding a proof of innocence.

Oh yes!—there was a man in the road—what did M. Louis know? He came from a *sentier* by the roadside. But, said his master, speaking French *de rigueur,* as English was not understood, "Cet homme était au mi-chemin," meaning in the middle of the road. M. Louis misunderstood, or pretended to. "J'avais passé le mi-chemin," said he, meaning, apparently, half-way to the village. Then he tried to assist by speaking English. "He wass bloke ze hackross," and then finished naturally with, "Que diable allait il faire au milieu de la rue?"

"Ou—avez—vous—vu—dernièrement—cet homme?" said the Baronet, a loud word at a time, to make sure of reaching that strange organism, a foreigner's brain. M. Louis understood, anyhow.

"A peine l'ai-je vu! Je n'ai fait que jeter un coup d'œil, et pst! —il est disparu. Je ne l'ai pas cru blessé. Pour moi, il n'a pas souffert la moindre égratignure. Que voulez-vous? On ne peut pas avoir l'œil à tout!" But his speech was not absolutely consistent, for he added, "Pourquoi diable ne put-il s'abriter sous la haie?" He evidently thought the road belonged to the motor interest, and that the world ought to run for the nearest sheltered corner at the sound of his horn.

Lord Felixthorpe endeavoured to impress him with the advisability of telling the truth, as a mere matter of policy. There would be a case to go to a Jury, unless the inquest decided that Jim Coupland had died by the Visitation of Providence. But M. Louis might feel secure of fair treatment; and, unless he had sinned grossly, need be under no apprehension of serious consequences to himself. As the chauffeur knew he *had* sinned grossly, in not slacking speed at the curve, his apprehensions continued. But he seemed convinced, when he went away, that it might be wisest to say the least possible for the present.

"We must look out sharp," said Sir Murgatroyd, "and make sure the Coroner's Jury is fairly chosen. I can't have any leniency shown to County Families, Frank. I'm inclined now towards seeing what I can make of Judith. I see no use putting it off. . . . By-the-bye, Frank, what did that story-telling Mossoo mean by

talking about a blind man—avoogle's blind, isn't it?—and then saying he hardly saw Jim? . . . what? . . ."

"I didn't hear him say anything about a blind man."

"No, no—before you came—when he first came back. He said 'avoogle.'"

"I expect he knows all about it. See what Judith has to say!"

Sir Murgatroyd didn't seem at all in a hurry for his interview with his daughter. He hung about, finishing topics up. He dropped his voice to say, "Poor Jim! Taylor said he was just expecting his little girl back. And now she'll come back and find him lying dead."

"Ah—the nice little girl, Lizarann. Yes—I had forgotten Lizarann. Poor little woman!" For remember it was this young swell who had made Lizarann's acquaintance near two years since, in Tallack Street. Do you recollect?—when William Rufus called him Scipio.

CHAPTER L

OF MARIANNE AT BROADSTAIRS, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A "DREADNOUGHT." AND HOW SHE READ OF HER HUSBAND'S ACCIDENT ON ITS ARMOUR-PLATES, AND AT ONCE STARTED FOR ROYD. BUT SUPPOSE THEY CALLED HER "LADY CHALLIS"!

MARIANNE CHALLIS, or, as she preferred to be called, Craik, had sentenced herself to an embittered life, and knew it. But she had, as we have said, so much in her of the dogged tenacity and vengefulness of a Red Indian brave that scarcely any idea of surrender had ever, so far, entered her mind. Whenever the smallest suspicion of wavering had approached its outskirts, during the year and a half of her residence with her mother at Broadstairs, she had at once brought into the field an auxiliary force, the consolation to her conscience that she was, at least, no longer "living in sin" with the father of her children. Even if her jealousy of what she found a satisfaction in calling his "connection with" Miss Arkroyd—a phrase first used, dexterously, by Charlotte Eldridge—had been ill-founded, which it wasn't, it would have been a misapprehension to be thankful for, in that it had made her alive to the heinousness of her immoral life, and qualified her to go before the Bar of an Offended God, not only with mere lame apologies for the existence of her two girls, but with a statement of account, claiming payment of Joy over the Sinner that Repenteth. Where would have been the use of pleading, before that Awful Throne, that she was "only Kate's half-sister"?

This story knows that accusation will be brought against it of "sneering" at things sacred; but let the accuser try to depict the frame of mind of this poor lady without seeming to do so. Marianne had accepted her mother's Choctaw Deity, a creation of the sullen vices of her own mind, on the strength of an assurance that he was also the God of the man who paid, in Syria, the penalty of the most intrepid and magnificent attempt to touch the hearts of men the world has ever known. Let him be sure that when he talks of "things sacred" he is really holding those things sacred that that man was tortured to death for proclaiming the truth of, two thousand years ago, and that he is not exalting the comicalities of a Theologism.

But the outcome of it all was an embittered life for Marianne. And the bitterness was bound to come out—could not be concealed. It showed itself in severity towards her children to some extent, but very much more in acrimony towards her mother. It was just as well, perhaps, that the safety-valve existed. The worthy old lady would have been quarrelling with some one else if she had not quarrelled with her daughter; so it was all one to her.

This old lady was the soul of dissension and savage righteousness. It must not be understood that what Bob called a "regular set-to between Gran and the Mater" was of daily occurrence. Often a week would pass without a battle-royal. But no hour ever passed without an exchange of shots. Bob's reports to his father of the life at Belvedere Villa, Broadstairs, were highly coloured, perhaps, but they enabled the author to picture to himself a daily routine not far from the truth. When Bob stated that Old Gran was all shaky-waky with rage to begin with, and would pucker up and fly at a moment's notice if you didn't look uncommon sharp, Challis accepted the first clause of the indictment as a false diagnosis of the tremulousness of old age; the second as realistic poetry; and the condition precedent of immunity at the end as an admission that his son's own attitude was not always faultless. When that young man said it was "pray, pray, pray, all day long," and he didn't see the fun, his father perceived that his meaning was that religious exercises were protracted beyond usage, for instance, of the Deanery at Inchester; where, according to Bob, it was "once and done with." Besides, the Dean didn't snuffle, and Old Gran did. Challis remarked that Bob would have cut a poor figure as a Hindu Yogi, and felt grateful in his heart to Dean Tillotson for not snuffling. It might arrest a violent reaction on Bob's part against all Religion, Law, Order, and Morality. For Challis would not trust anyone but himself without the first; weak natures, like other people's, might lose touch with the other three as well, and take to the secret manufacture of melinite. He never suspected himself of a weak nature.

These illuminations had been thrown on Belvedere Villa after Bob's first visit there, a year since. This August he was acquiring more dignified forms of speech, befitting a fifth-form boy. But he was still capable of saying that he had seen "awfully little" of his Governor these holidays. Indeed, if he had not gone with him to a place in Derbyshire for a week, he would hardly have set eyes on him. Then if his Governor was stopping on a week at this beastly little place—Heaven knows why!—why shouldn't *he*? Why was *he* to go to Broadstairs? However, he went. And from Broad-

stairs he wrote to his Governor, at Brideswell-Poulgreave, Derby, saying that Gran was "as bad, if not worse, than ever," and provoked severe criticism of his English in reply. He had his revenge, though, for he pelted his Governor with samples of the same solecism, cut from current literature, till the accumulations became quite formidable.

It may seem strange, but the story must record it, that almost the only thing that gave poor Marianne any real pleasure during this year-and-a-half in her mother's house was the reading from time to time in the newspapers of the literary successes of "Titus"; for to her he never ceased to be Titus. So self-contradictory was her frame of mind that, when "Aminta Torrington" made such a sensation just after Christmas, her bosom swelled with pride over the play's success, just as though she herself had been by the author's side at the fall of the curtain. Her curiosity was intense to know whether or not the name of the actress who personated Aminta was her own or one assumed by that detestable woman to whom she owed all her unhappiness. "Silvia Berens" puzzled her, because it sounded familiar. But not sufficiently so to be sure she had known it in those last days she had spent at the Hermitage.

It was a grievous vexation to have no one she could take into her confidence. She would have shrunk from showing her inner mind to her mother, even if there had been the slightest prospect of the old woman knowing anything on dramatic or literary subjects; and when she threw out a feeler to Charlotte Eldridge, that lady irritated her by taking for granted that the pleasure she had expressed was a creditable impulse of generosity, and not spontaneous at all. Just like Charlotte! And all the while her pleasure was a reality she had a right to indulge in—a luxury she could allow herself without any weak concession to feelings she had destined to extinction.

For the fact is Marianne had never ceased to love the father of her children. Can a woman ever succeed in doing so, except by hating him? Now, Choctaw as she was, she was under no obligation to detest her husband as long as she could fully gratify her hatred elsewhere. Judith Arkroyd had the full benefit of it—drew the fire of her batteries on herself. Oh, the hypocrisy of that letter the girl had the impertinence to write to her! But *she* saw through it. As for Titus, did she not know him well enough to know he would be mere wax in the hands of a designing woman like that? Oh yes!—*she* knew how to flatter him, no doubt! And how to make the best of herself, too. Charlotte could at least sym-

pathize about *that; she* knew the sort this Judith was! Indeed, Charlotte had been liberal in her realistic suggestions about Judith, who may have been in some ways no better than she made her out, but who was certainly short of the standard of depravity this moralist vouched for in telegraph-girls, her *bêtes-noires* in all that touched the purity of the domestic hearth. Charlotte's sidelights on the Tophet incident, as explained in "that hypocritical letter from the girl herself," would have done credit to Paul de Kock.

Chewing this cud—or these cuds; which should it be?—would take the poor woman so perilously near a fit of exculpation of Titus that she was often forced to have recourse to the old story of their consanguinity to keep her resentment up to the mark. Yes!—she would—she could—go through a mental operation technically called "forgiving" Titus. But go back to him? No! She had sinned, all those years, in ignorance, and with a false ideal of her husband, who had now fallen from his high estate. And look you!—it was not only this Judith business. How about that other story? How about that Steptoe story, not an hour's walk from here? She found the neighbourhood of Ramsgate oppressive to her.

No—she could never go back to Titus, whatever happened. Not even if this Bill that was to come into Parliament were to make marriages like hers and Titus's lawful for the future. What was wrong was wrong, and how the House of Lords could make it right was more than Marianne could understand. She wasn't aware that it was the House of Lords that originally made it wrong.

But if she did her duty towards the supposed instructions of Holy Writ—which she did not doubt could be found somewhere, as her mother was so positive about them—she might claim as a set-off the pleasure of reading the literary columns of the daily Press in the hope of coming on Titus's name. She did more reading in that year-and-a-half than she had done in all the rest of her life put together. And as she was not literate enough to skim, she had to plod; and plodding is slow work in the columns of a voluminous Sunday paper—the largest possible paper in the smallest possible type. But one does get a lot for one's penny, whether it's *Lloyd's Weekly*, or the *Dispatch*, or the *People*; and there's sure to be all the theatrical news and recent publications, whichever you take. So Marianne pored intently over one or the other, every Sunday afternoon, on the sofa; while her parent dipped into sermons, or ran her eye through the Prayer-book, now and then looking at the newspaper. Not, that is to say, in the mere cant sense of the phrase, but glaring at it wolfishly over her own more

legible type, with a basilisk eye to slay the profane intruder. The presence of the unhallowed secular abomination in the house on the Lord's Day was a bone of contention between the mother and daughter; but the old lady had had to give in, and every Sunday afternoon saw strained relations in abeyance, and the tension of a skin-deep concord, that might or might not last until the children should be allowed down, and given the obnoxious thing to make boats of.

On this particular Sunday—the day following the events of last chapter—Marianne's attention seemed deeper and more prolonged than usual. She had found something that interested her. It was taxing her apprehension severely, and she had no one to go to for enlightenment. But it is not human to accept exasperation in silence, and Marianne saw a prospect of relief in putting her mother's uselessness as an informant on record. So she said, as though referring to a matter of course, "I suppose it's no use asking *you* what these Parliament things mean," and went on reading.

Few people admit complete ignorance in any department without a struggle. "Perhaps I know nothing about anything," said the old woman, snarling meekly. "Perhaps I know more than you choose to think I know. Now snap!" These last words claimed the position of a private reflection made by a person of rare self-restraint in a den of mad dogs. There was nothing unlike her mother in them, and Marianne left them unnoticed, and continued:

"I suppose you don't know what is meant by 'an amendment to remove from the Bill its retrospective character'?" For Marianne had got at the report of the sitting of the House of Lords of two days since; and though she had kept herself uninformed, intentionally, on the subject related to, still, when she saw it all in print, her curiosity took the bit in its teeth, and she read.

"It happens that you are entirely wrong, because it happens that that is just the one thing I do happen to know. But I shall not talk about it on this day." This resolution lasted quite three minutes, when the speaker resumed, under a kind of protest that the little she had to say wouldn't count. "You know perfectly well what Mr. Tillingfleet said in his last letter about this wicked Bill business."

"What did he say?"

"You know perfectly well."

"I do not."

The self-denying ordinance of Sabbath silence became too hard

to keep. The old lady broke out, "You know perfectly well that Mr. Tillingfleet said that, if this Bill was given a retrospective character, you would have to be Mr. Challis's wife again, and live with him, whether you liked it or not."

"I don't recollect that he said any such thing. I don't believe he *did*."

"You can get his letter and look at it, if you doubt your mother's word on Sunday." This was not an admission of fibs on week-days; it referred to the intensification of unfiliality as a Sabbath vice. The speaker closed her eyes and began saying nothing about the subject again, in fulfilment of her manifesto.

Marianne ran her eyes over the scanty fringe of letters stuck in the mirror-frame over the chimney-piece. Mr. Tillingfleet's business handwriting was soon found. "He *does* say no such thing," said she, after reading it to herself. "What he says is absolutely and entirely different."

"I am corrected. When you are quiet once more, perhaps you will kindly tell me *what* he says?"

"Grandmamma, I tell you plainly it is no use trying to make me out in a temper, because I'm not. . . ."

"Go on. I am accustomed to being snapped at."

"I shall not go on if you talk like that."

"*I* have no wish to hear the letter again. Don't read it if you don't want to. I know perfectly well what's in it." The venerable lady then murmured to herself, most offensively, "Three little Liver Pills." It was one of her practices to sketch correctives for controversial opponents, the doses increasing in proportion to the degree of diversity of opinion.

Marianne, armed with a combative immobility of face and monotony of accent, read aloud from Mr. Tillingfleet's letter. "'The retrospective action of the measure now before Parliament will, if carried, seriously affect the relations of Sir Alfred Challis and your daughter. It will undoubtedly determine the technical legitimacy of their children, and give their *de facto* father a legal right to their guardianship.' There!" says Marianne in conclusion, replacing the letter in the looking-glass.

But her mother rallies her forces with asperity against the assumptions of this monosyllable, saying enigmatically that she is "not going to be 'there'd.'" It is ridiculous, she says, to pretend that she said that Mr. Tillingfleet said there was anything in the Bill to compel anyone to do anything. But, for all that, Marianne would have to live with her husband again, or go without her children.

Marianne walked up and down the room over this, chafing. She couldn't believe such disgraceful injustice was possible. Besides, if the Bill passed ever so, Titus would never have the meanness to take her children from her. To think that, all this year past, he could have married that girl at any moment, and then to have a right to his children!

Grandmamma said she would never be the least surprised at any freethinker committing bigamy. All freethinkers committed something, or many things, for that matter, avoiding felony from motives of policy. "He knows that his children are contrary to the Act of Parliament now, and that he's no right to them, and that's why he keeps his distance. You'll see, Marianne, that it will be quite another story if this wicked Bill passes."

"I don't believe it. Anyhow, it hasn't passed yet! Besides, the amendment was withdrawn."

"Well!"

"Well, of course! Then the Bill won't have a retrospective character." But the old lady was too sharp to fall into this topsy-turvy view of the case, and presently succeeded in convincing her daughter of her mistake. However, Perplexity was only scotched, not killed. "Suppose Titus had married this girl already, I mean, and the Bill passes, which of us would be his wife? I don't see how any amount of retrospects could unmarry *them*." Thus Marianne; and her mother can't meet the difficulty off-hand.

But consideration lights on a solution. "It would make your children legitimate, and he would claim them," says she, with the sort of glee in ambush people feel over a fellow-creature caught in a legal man-trap.

But Marianne's short sight is often clear sight. "What rubbish!" says she. "If Miss Arkroyd had a baby. . . . No!—I don't care, Grandmamma. She wouldn't be Titus's wife, if she married him at all the churches in London, and you know it. . . . Yes!—I say again, if she had a baby, Titus would have two legitimate families at once, and she would be his Law-wife, and I shouldn't. It's silly!"

Those who read the Debates on this question at the time—it is not so long ago all this happened—will remember that arguments akin to this one of Marianne's repulsed the forlorn hopes of the Bill's opponents, and clinched its retrospective character. What has happened to women who had married their sister's husbands, and been superseded by a "lawful" wife, before the passing of this Bill, the story knows not. Have the husbands been convicted of retrospective bigamy?

But this story has little more concern with the intricacies of difficult legislation in this matter than with those that have arisen in any other coercion by Law of the private lives of the non-aggressive classes. It is hopeless, apparently, to look forward to a day when the guiding rule of the law-giver will be non-interference with all but molestation; but one may indulge in satisfaction at each removal from the Statute Book of an enactment that infringes it.

Marianne's last speech, recorded above, shows a curious frame of mind. She had thrust her husband away from her in a fit of jealousy—not an ill-grounded one, by any means—and had bolstered up her conscience by what she more than half suspected to be a false pretext; but one in which she felt sure of the support of Grundydom in Great Britain, *passim*. How if this new legislation, or abrogation of old legislation, should undermine the fortress of her powerful allies, and leave a small and unconsidered band of bigots to fight the battle of an imaginary consanguinity? Those are not the words of her mind—only the gist of her thought. What she said to herself was that now there was to be an Act of Parliament everyone would go round the other way. To her that included the thought that the old catchwords that had done duty for so long would begin to ring false when brought into collision with that powerful agency, a Parliamentary majority. Since she had been dwelling so constantly on the subject she had more than once found herself face to face with impeachments of well-worn arguments derived from Scripture; notably when she found that one Biblical denunciation treated a marriage with a woman who might have one day become her husband's Deceased Wife's Sister, but who would not have been so when he married her, unless he had waited for that *sine qua non*, his wife's death. Thoughts of this sort strengthened and multiplied as the time drew nearer for this Parliamentary discussion, and here was the Bill apparently going to become Law, and by a backhanded thrust to make her Titus's "Law-wife" again, as well as what her own heart in some mysterious way proclaimed her to be—namely, his *real* wife, whatever that meant! She was certainly in a very curious, confused, self-contradictious frame of mind, was Marianne.

Perhaps her contradiction and confusion had never been much greater than on this Sunday afternoon, where the story has left her for so long, feverishly pacing up and down the room, after puzzling her poor stupid head trying to follow the Debate, and make some sense of it. She had succeeded in finding out that the Bill was nearly through Parliament, and that it would affect her and Titus more than she had conceived possible hitherto.

She was working herself up into a state of bitten lips and sobs kept in abeyance. Her mother was not the person to encourage this sort of thing. "If you must prowl, Marianne," said she, "can't you go and prowl somewhere else?"

Her daughter may have shown her state of mind; for as she returned to her sofa, her amiable mother added, "If you are going to sniff and make a scene, Marianne, you had better have the children down." The old woman was sitting with her eyes shut, and really had very slight data to go on.

"Whatever Titus was, at least he wasn't unkind!" said Marianne tartly. But she touched the bell-handle, and its sound was followed by the prompt appearance of Mumps and Chobbles, now no longer known by those names, which had been to some extent their father's private property. The younger child came into the room shouting, with jumps as emphasis, "Now we may have the Thunday papers to make boats of, long ones and short ones."

The construction of a Navy had been a great *pièce de résistance* at the Hermitage in old days. The vessels had weak points; notably that when the deck was flattened out on completion, the cut-water was apt to part amidships, unless firmly held together by a neighbouring shipwright, or stuck together with a pin. But this last practice was looked upon with suspicion, as hardly legititmate. The question does not arise, so far as we are aware, at Chatham or Devonport; as in no case are ships first constructed with decks analogous to the bottoms of wine-bottles seen from within, and levelled down before launching.

Traditions of bygone Dockyards naturally survived, and gave rise to controversy. Marianne was always in dread of some painful reminder of the past during ship-building. But it kept the children quiet; so, though she had not seen the whole of the paper, owing to the difficulty of analyzing that Debate, she conceded it to the Contractors.

Now, a practice obtained between them quite at variance with the care and foresight usually shown in the placing of new ships on the stocks. If in any of the Government Dockyards it is common for the actual length of a ship to remain an open question until the moment of construction, it should surely be made the subject of a question in Parliament! Mumps and Chobbles, having obtained the paper, differed about the length of the first hull to be put in hand. Chobbles preferred a normal full sheet, alleging that vessels built of two sheets were only just seaworthy, owing to weakness of the backbone. Mumps was ambitious, advocating a ship of huge length, made with two full sheets. Chob-

bles opposed this scheme on the ground that, if pushed, such a vessel would collapse, or go scrunch. Mumps, however, had set her heart on it.

"Papa *thaid* it wouldn't go scrunch—not if we sticked it over in the middle—not if we pulled bofe the edges across—not if we doo'd like viss." Mumps ended an imperfect description with a practical demonstration of how the vessel might be strengthened in the middle if some of the length were sacrificed. "Overlap" was the word she wanted.

"Then we must have wafers," said Chobbles. Because otherwise, you see, the ship might come in half, and founder—who knows?—with all on board.

"You may have wafers if you won't quarrel," said the mother of the shipwrights. And wafers being obtained from her writing-desk, a threat of violence from Mumps was withdrawn and overlooked.

Now it so chanced that, the newspaper being large and difficult to control, Chobbles, as principal, gave instructions to Mumps to hold the two sheets the long ship was to be made from as directed, while she herself stuck the two together, cautiously advancing across the paper on her knees. A more mature shipwright would have wafered the two corners first, and distributed the remaining wafers over the space between, so as to make the most of them. As it turned out, Mumps shifted her corner while Chobbles was yet half-way, and when Chobbles completed, dismay ensued. For the paper didn't lie straight, and all the wafers were used up. Words followed, and recriminations. Mumps maintained that she had held on to her corner loyally, unwaveringly; Chobbles that she could not have done so, because she herself had selected a passage in large type as the point Mumps was to remain faithful to. She was in a position to show that if her little sister had adhered to her instructions, the accident would not have happened.

"What are those children fighting about?" said their Grandmamma, who had fallen asleep—had been snoring, in fact—and who waked suddenly. "It all comes, Marianne, of your letting them play on Sunday afternoon. When I was a child I should have been writing out the sermon, and well whipped if I couldn't recollect it. . . ." And so forth.

"What's all that noise about, children?" said their mother. "If you can't make less I shall ring for Martha to take you back to the nursery. Be quieter!"

Chobbles plunged straight into indictment, Mumps into justification. "I said, 'Hold the corner to Motor Car,' and Mumps

didn't." . . . "I *did* held it to Motor Car, and never leaved it loose one minute." . . . "You did *not* hold it to Motor Car, or it would be up against Motor Car now." . . . "Be-because you shov-oveled it all crooked, and it wors your fault and it worsn't my fault" . . . and more to the same effect, came mixed with heart-broken lamentations over the ruin of the great ship's chances; for all the wafers but two were licked and used, and the wobble of the raw material was too disheartening for any attempt to be made to rectify it.

"It just serves you right for quarrelling about it," said Grandmamma savagely, taking a mean advantage of the difficulties youth has in convicting maturity of defective reasoning. "And it serves *you* right, Marianne, for letting the children have the horrible things at all." She went on to point out that all the benefit of Afternoon Service was lost if contact with such profanities was permitted afterwards.

Meanwhile Marianne, painfully conscious that in these days she could not say, as of old, "What would your father say if he heard you quarrel like that?"—for fear of complications—went to the children, still at daggers drawn over the newspaper on the floor, to make an official investigation of the facts.

Did not the story note, a page ago, that she had altogether missed a sheet of the paper? She had, and it was an important one; the one containing the very Latest Intelligence and Stop-the-press News. And the words "Motor Car," chosen by Chobbles as a finger-guide for her small sister, formed part of the following piece of Latest Intelligence:—"*Fatal Motor-Car Accident.*—An accident, which has already caused one death, and which it is feared may have other fatal results, occurred yesterday morning at Royd, in Rankshire, close to the seat of Sir Murgatroyd Arkroyd, Bart., some years since Member for the County. The car, the property of Lord Felixthorpe, Sir Murgatroyd's son-in-law, was turning a sharp corner near the picturesque and interesting spot known as 'The Abbey Well,' when the deceased, a man known as 'Blind Jim,' stepped incautiously into the middle of the road, so suddenly that the promptest action of the chauffeur in his application of the brake could not avert a catastrophe. Unfortunately, as the car swerved, one of its occupants, a gentleman whose name had not transpired at the moment of writing, rose to his feet in his apprehension that a mishap was impending, and was thrown violently into the road, falling on his head. He was conveyed to Royd Hall insensible, but we understand that hopes are confidently entertained of his recovery. We are glad to be

able to add that the lady who was the other occupant of the car, Miss Judith Arkroyd, the eldest daughter of Sir Murgatroyd, had the good fortune to sustain no injury beyond the inevitable shock attendant on so tragic an occurrence." Jim's death was rather taken for granted in this paragraph; no doubt the wire on which it was founded had felt the greater importance of the motorists. No one ever knew who sent it. In such cases, no one ever does.

The overlap amidships just hid all but the first three lines; and when Marianne examined it, with a view to remedying the miscarriage, she attached no more importance to "Fatal Motor Accident," in large capitals, than to any other mishaps the newspaper world gets killed in. There are always accidents! But in the course of a laborious detachment of the last two or three wafers, to be employed in reconstruction if gummy enough, the words "Royd in Rankshire" were uncovered, and caught her eye.

"Stop, children!—don't fuss and worry. I want to read this. . . . Royd Hall in Rankshire." . . . The last words were said to herself in relief of thought, not as information for the children, who didn't matter.

"*What's* that about Royd in Rankshire?" Grandmamma waked suddenly, and put a good deal of side on her snarl, provisionally, not knowing how much acrimony might turn out to be needed.

"Wait till I've read it, and I'll tell you."

"Oh, don't tell me if you don't like. It's no concern of mine." Nevertheless, Marianne, after reading through the paragraph to herself—during which the old lady affected perusal of a sermon—took her anxiety to hear for granted, and read it through aloud. It met with the comment:

"I suppose that's what you grunted at, the first time?"

"Suppose what's what I grunted at . . . oh! 'had the good fortune to sustain no injury,' do you mean? Well, Grandmamma, I suppose you wouldn't expect me to cry my eyes out if . . ."

"If 'handsome Judith' got her beauty spoiled—is that it?"

"I shouldn't cry my eyes out. I wonder who her other gentleman was, in the car! I'm glad it wasn't Titus, at any rate."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, mamma, how can you be such a fool, when Bob heard from his father only yesterday, at that place in Derbyshire; he got the letter this morning." Bob had been at Broadstairs a week at this date, and, in pursuance of a policy of avoiding his grandmother on Sundays, when she was liable to malignant forms of piety, had started early in the day to walk to Canterbury—his be-

loved Tillotson was staying there with an ecclesiastical relative—where he would stop the night, and whence he would walk back next day, accompanied probably by Tillotson. Well!—it was only eighteen miles!

Marianne was as sure that her husband was safe, leagues away from Royd Hall, yesterday morning, as she was that she had packed off Bob with sandwiches and cake after an early breakfast twelve hours ago, and that he and Tillotson were enjoying Choral Services and Purple Emperors alternately to their hearts' content. She was satisfied—not reasonably; but then, it was comfortable to be unreasonable—that he had posted the letter as soon as it was written; and as it reached on Sunday, it was posted on Saturday. What could be clearer?

She was so comfortable about it that she re-read the paragraph once or twice, not quite without a kindling hope that Miss Arkroyd's motoring about with a gentleman unnamed might "mean something"—mean something, that is, that would end the chapter of Titus's admiration for, or "connection with," Miss Arkroyd. It didn't matter which you called it.

One thing was clear enough. The injured man was a stranger to the purveyor of the news; not the owner of the car, just mentioned, nor any other of the *habitués* of Royd Hall, all of whom would be well known in the neighbourhood. Oh yes!—that was all right. She hoped, however, that if he was an aspirant to Miss Arkroyd's hand, he was not seriously damaged, so as to diminish his probabilities of success. As for "Blind Jim," she was sorry for him, with a general feeling that "handsome Judith" was responsible for his mishap, but without any definite recollection of him. She may never have heard him mentioned at all, for Mrs. Steptoe was not communicative about her brother; and although Challis had certainly made Lizarann's acquaintance before Marianne left her home, it was only on that last day of his abruptly terminated visit to Royd. And that was all ancient history by now.

She resumed the reconstruction question quite at ease in her mind; if anything, with a sense of something not unpleasant having happened. Further search yielded two or three more wafers, and the ship was completed and launched. But the resistance, to shearing-force, of the bolts that held the fore and aft parts together had not been properly calculated. A dissension between the owners led to an attempt to drag her two ways at once, and—to use very un-nautical language—she gave at the wafers. Mumps, seized with despair, was told that if she roared and stamped, she shouldn't

be allowed to make ships at all; and her mother, to show that she was in earnest, picked up the shattered vessel, and proceeded to re-embody it as the Sunday paper. But a something caught her eye, and she read again.

A moment after Grandmamma, rousing herself wrathfully, exclaimed, "What is all this horrible noise about? Those children had better go upstairs. I tell you they *shall go,* Marianne; I won't have the noise any longer!" and began pulling the bell to summon Martha, the nurse. She must have taken a sound that came from her daughter for protest or remonstrance; for she stormed on, heedless that the voice of the two children had changed from mere unruliness to terror. "It's no use your saying 'yow,' because I tell you I won't have it. On Sunday afternoon, too! . . . *What?*" She turned furiously, but her fury gave place to alarm as she caught sight of her daughter, ashy white, gasping to speak, but speechless; clutching with one hand the paper that had been the ship, pointing to something in it with the other.

Then Marianne found a voice, or a voice she hardly knew as her own, to cry out chokingly, "Oh, Titus, Titus!—dying!" She relinquished the paper to her mother, saying, "Oh yes—here!—oh, here! Look, look! . . ." still pointing, and then covering her eyes, with a cry of despair: "He is dying—dying! Oh, children, children, your father will die, and I shall not be beside him!"

"You fool!" said the old lady. "Don't go on like a mad thing. Before the children!" She was scared, but it must be admitted she showed discipline. "You might at least be quiet while I read it. . . . No!—*Wait,* Martha! . . . can't you see? . . . you servants never *can* see . . ." She took the paper to the window—for the light was failing—and read to herself. After a minute, she said abruptly, "Ho!" and then *sotto voce,* "He'll die in her arms, at any rate." And then this venerable woman—let us hope with an affectation of indifference to the fate of her son-in-law, contrived something nearly approaching a snigger as an accompaniment to the remark, aloud, "*He* won't die! *You* needn't fret yourself. Handsome Judith will see that he's properly doctored up." Leniency might have supposed this an attempt to strengthen her daughter against her trouble by appealing to her resentment. If so, it was an impolitic one. For Marianne, apparently as a response, said decisively, "I shall go to him at once," and seemed to mean it.

"Don't be an idiot! You can't pay for your ticket. You haven't any money, and *I* shan't give you any." But it seemed

that Marianne had money, so this attempt to hinder her departure only hastened it. She was not one to submit to coercion tamely. To be brief, she put a few necessaries in a bag, hugged her children well, consoling them as best she could, begged that the news should be kept from Bob till more was known—for this Marianne, with all her faults, had a strong leaven of family affection—and caught the quick train for London.

She would have travelled all night had there been a train. As it was, she was up very early at the Hotel, got a poor breakfast, and left Euston by the first express, before eight o'clock struck. Would Titus be alive on her arrival?

For the item of "Stop-the-press News" that had caught her eye, and thrown a light on the paragraph she had just read, ran as follows: "Name of gentleman thrown from motor-car yesterday morning at Royd, Sir Alfred Challis, well-known author and playwright; condition precarious, but not despaired of."

In the greatest stress of trouble absurd thoughts hang about like imps, and vex one with their insignificance. All through that five hours' rail Marianne was plagued with the question:—Suppose those people chose to address her as "Lady Challis," what should she do?

CHAPTER LI

HOW CHALLIS CAME TO, AND SPOKE. BUT HE ASKED FOR MARIANNE, AND DIDN'T KNOW JUDITH FROM ADAM. HOW THE LATTER PROMISED TO TELL HER FATHER. THE WORLD'S GUESSES, MEANWHILE. HOW THE DUCHESS SAID WHAT THE POINT WAS, AND CHALLIS RELAPSED

It was on a Saturday, the twenty-fourth of August, that Alfred Challis met with his mishap, at half-past nine in the morning. It was not till eight o'clock on Monday that he began to regain consciousness, very slowly, having been nearly forty-eight hours speechless, and seemingly insensible.

Experience tends to show that in most cases of recovery from coma, whether the cause be traumatic or otherwise, the first memories that present themselves are those of the last events of which the patient has been conscious. With Challis it was otherwise. During his stupor he had forgotten, apparently, all about his accident—about what led to it—about Royd Hall, his infatuation for Judith, his wife's desertion. Nothing of the story of the past year-and-a-half was left when he first became aware that he was in a strange room, lying on luxurious pillows, with a great deal of bandage on his head and a great deal of pain inside it. What must seem strangest of all was that he had forgotten Judith herself!

For Judith, whose communications with her family will be easiest explained later, had been roused before her usual calling-time by her little maid, Cintilla, who announced joyously that if Judith pleased, miss, Sir Alfred Challis had spoken. "Did he ask for me?" said the young lady. But Cintilla couldn't say. The nurse didn't hear words. A nurse had been got from Grime on the Saturday afternoon.

"Ask the nurse not to talk to anyone else till I can come," said Judith. Then she scrambled into some clothes and a *peignoir*, and went straight to his bedside.

"My little Cintilla said Sir Alfred Challis had spoken, Miss O'Connor, but that you couldn't make out what he said?"

"Oh yes—I'm quite sure he spoke. But I shouldn't like to swear to the words, Miss Arkroyd."

"But short of swearing to them . . . you've an impression?"

"Yes—but I think it must have been a mistaken one. I thought what he said was 'Polly Anne.' . . . Perhaps there's someone? . . ."

The story has more than once spoken of Judith Arkroyd's splendid nerve and powers of self-control—at least, against all moral disturbing forces. On this occasion the perfect self-possession with which she said, "Oh yes!—he was speaking of his wife," would have done credit to Julius Cæsar or Napoleon.

The nurse showed by a perfectly natural question her absolute unsuspicion of a fox under the cloak. "Had Lady Challis far to come?" For she must have been sent for—that saw itself.

"We don't know—I mean, we don't know where Lady Challis is. When Sir Alfred comes to himself, he will tell us. . . . Is he not speaking again? . . ." Yes, he was. Both listened. Judith was reflective a moment over what to do; then said: "Would you kindly knock at my father's door, and say we think Sir Alfred *is* coming to himself? Or tell James to tell him." The nurse thinks to herself: "More obvious, surely, for this young lady to hunt up her father, and leave the patient to me!" But Judith, seeing hesitation, suggests a motive. When Sir Alfred opens his eyes he may be alarmed to find himself alone with a professional nurse. Also, Judith is always authoritative.

She seemed half-frightened of the patient, left alone with him. Would not you, woman, who are reading this, have taken the hand of the man if you loved him? Did Judith love him? She did not take his hand. Do you find her inexplicable? She was not really so; it is only the story's want of skill that makes her seem so. Then, think of the conflict of feeling and motive under her circumstances. . . . However, let that wait!

Perhaps it was as well that she did not take his hand. Possibly what she did and said was safest, all things considered. She remained standing, immovable as a statue, by the bedside, and when his eyes opened and turned to her, more in inquiry than astonishment or alarm, said simply, "Well?" and waited for speech to come from him.

"Are you real?" said Challis. Her white, scared look and seeming shrinking from him grew more marked. His words, creepy and uncanny all the more that their speaker uttered them so equably, made her fear his reason had given way. Even those who have loved one demented will shrink from his insanity. But she kept her self-command, and replied with a voice under control:

"Scroop—do you not know me? I am Judith."

"Judith?"

"Yes—Judith Arkroyd. Do you not remember?"

"Judith Arkroyd—yes—a—oh yes!" There was an amiable air about him of a wish to be civil—an evasive acquiescence he might have shown to an attractive lady he had met in Society, and now met again and took the word of for her identity. He would talk a little, and something in the conversation would soon remind him whom he was speaking to. That sort of thing! His provisional pretence of recognition was more convincing a thousand times of his forgetfulness than any amount of denial of it would have been.

What could Judith do? Attack the position at once? Say to him: "Try to think! Try to recall all our love-passages of this year past! Remember the little garden in the moonlight, and your arms you found it so hard to restrain within the rules of good-breeding! Remember your mad, hot outburst, and your flight from an *entichement* you found insupportable; your quarrel with you wife; your troth-plight and mine; the tension of that Bill question. And last and most, or worst, that automobile and the man ahead, already as good as slain! Think of any of these things, and surely you will remember that this is I, Judith, that was to have been your wife!" All that this man must have forgotten, to forget *her*, rushed through Judith's mind, to take form in words should she nerve herself to utter it, or any choice from it. But the next thing he said clashed so ruthlessly with the last of her thought that speech on those lines was made hopeless.

"My head aches so confoundedly that I feel quite an idiot, and can't think of anything. But I can see one thing—someone is being very kind to me. I think if my wife were to come she would be able to thank you for me. Is she not here? Can she not be got? My wife Polly Anne?"

Yes—the barrier of his utter lack of recognition could not be surmounted yet, if ever. She must accept the *rôle* of a stranger, for now, certainly—perhaps for good. Luckily, he had closed his eyes as his voice grew fainter with his effort, and died out on his last word. She fought bravely against the tremulousness of her own to say: "We do not know where to send to her. Can you tell us?"

"Yes—but don't frighten her. Send it as from me. Say I have had a slight accident—that is it, I suppose? . . ."

"Yes, you have had an accident—a fall."

". . . And am doing perfectly well. Mind you say that!"

"Oh yes—that shall be worded all right. But where are we to send?"

"Number eighty-three—I think it's number eighty-three—Great Coram Street." Again his great effort to speak overcame him; and, though he got through the last words plainly, they ended in a groan. Then Judith heard her father coming, and the nurse, and left the room to meet him. The nurse passed on into the room, but Sir Murgatroyd stopped to speak with his daughter. He looked ill and harassed, and his age was visible on him. The last two days had tried him, no doubt!

"They say Sir Alfred has spoken. Is that so?"

"Yes—he has been speaking to me. But, oh—papa—papa! . . ." It stopped him dead to hear the distress in her voice.

"Yes, dear child, what? Tell me—tell me all! . . ." It took her a moment to choke down a sob, and then it came.

"He does not know who I *am*—he does not *know* me." There is such a thing as a whisper, as well as a cry, of pain, and Judith's strong resolve of self-control curbed her last words down to one. Her father, as he took her in his arms, felt how she was trembling with the shock of her upset. She had borne the effects of the motor accident better than this.

The old gentleman kissed her tenderly, calling her by an old pet name he sometimes used. "Dear girl, dear Jujube," said he. "I am afraid you loved this man."

She seemed to recoil from this placing of the fact on record. "That is all over now," said she stonily. "But you are a dear good papa"; and kissed him in return affectionately. He seemed relieved, and said: "But now you will tell me all about it." She replied: "I will. All!" And then her mother came, in haste, and all went together into Challis's room. But previous exertions had told upon the patient, and he was equal to no more than a few broken words of thanks, recognizing no one, but somehow conscious that he was being hospitably cared for, and that his visitors were his hosts.

Up to this time Judith's family had been kept in the dark about the important fact in the story of the accident—the reason why Judith and Challis were in the motor-car at all. Each may have had his or her surmise as to the object of their rendezvous and sudden departure, but they had not conversed openly about it, so far. Sibyl had certainly said to her husband in confidence, at an hour when she supposed all the rest of the house asleep: "You'll see that I'm right, Frank! It was an elopement, pre-arranged. Fancy their meeting by accident—parcel of nonsense!" To which

her husband, who was going to sleep, and not in his usual linguistic form, had replied: "Oh, gammon, Sib!" Sibyl had then adduced reasons, such as that Challis could not have been on his way to the Rectory out there near the Park Gate; that the Duchess at least knew nothing of any appointment for Judith to come to the Castle at an hour which, according to her Grace, was "almost yesterday"; and that, most of all, M. Rossier had said Sir Alfred had a map in his pocket. What did Sir Alfred want with a map unless they were going a long distance? But his Lordship was not listening, and her Ladyship convicted him of it, and then both their ships went to sleep.

All this makes one *see* Judith, and how each member of her family, without being exactly afraid of her, left the elucidation of the mystery to the others. But behind a natural reluctance to belling the cat—though the metaphor is no doubt exaggerated—lay the feeling that the truth might work out as tragedy; the facts might contain the germs of heart-break. Silence certainly had its recommendations. Besides, explanation was inevitable in the end; so why analyze and probe now, with the uncertainty still hanging over us whether this gentleman would live or die; and the other uncertainty as to whether the inquest to-morrow would absolve the motor-car, or find that poor Jim had been the victim of its gross carelessness? Its owner was feeling bound to make a fight for its chauffeur, but he had told M. Rossier his mind as plainly as his French would permit.

As for poor Jim's death, there was no lack of perfectly honest and heart-felt sorrow for the tragical disaster on the part of any member of the family, except Judith. She *said* nothing, certainly; but surely it was a case in which a stony silence was ungraceful? However, her mother and sister let her go her own way. She was Judith!—and would be so to the end of the chapter.

Meanwhile it was a serious grief to the Baronet and Lord Felixthorpe, shared to a great extent by their respective wives, that poor Jim had left no family that would have been open to endowment or adoption. When Athelstan Taylor, arriving late on Saturday evening with Mr. Brownrigg, who had remained on at the Rectory, brought the full particulars of Jim's death, he had also the unpleasant task of crushing out all the plans Sir Murgatroyd and his wife were forming for Lizarann's benefit. They had all but adopted her in anticipation; indeed, a sort of competition for possession of the child had arisen between them and their son-in-law. But, alas!—poor little Lizarann, or the shell she had left, lay dead

in the sound of the sea that was to have done her so much good. It was a cruel disappointment to Sir Murgatroyd.

The Rector's surmises, which he kept to himself, about the true story of the motor-car and Challis's meeting with Judith, were based on fuller information than the Baronet's. He was quite satisfied in his own mind that the pair had resolved to anticipate the retrospective operation of the measure before Parliament by constituting themselves legally man and wife, and making its action in their case impossible. He knew Challis's disposition was towards taking this step; and while he was far from having the heart to say, "Serve him right!" of the man who, when he went up to his bedside and touched him and spoke to him, lay dead and irresponsive—perhaps never to speak again—still, he could not but feel that in that man's place he would soonest have taken his chance of some possible reasonable operation of Law later on. Failing which he would—so he thought—have borne his lot courageously as in any other case where Duty bars the road that Inclination beckons us to take. But, then, how about that awkward thought—what right would he have had to prescribe his own high moralities to a woman whose sole crime would have been that she loved him? "Judge not, that ye be not judged," said he to himself, as he turned from the impassive figure on the bed. You see, he *had* never been under fire on that battle-field! But, whatever he thought, he said not a word of it to the Baronet or the Family, and he purposely avoided speech apart with Judith. He looked forward, by preference, to hearing the first explanation from Challis himself.

The doctor came and went—saw no danger—anticipated early return to consciousness—would not oppose Sir Murgatroyd wiring for Sir Rhyscombe Edison, if he thought it necessary; but he did not see, neither did a colleague, summoned from Grime to consult, what Sir Rhyscombe could say more than "Wait with patience!" Apparently there was no depression of the cranium, and certainly there was no fracture. Still, it was all for their interest that Sir Rhyscombe should come; the less responsibility for himself and Dr. Shaw Cox, the better for them! Sir Murgatroyd consented to let the wire he had written stand over till next day, though he nearly went back on his word when his wife said: "Just consider!—a two hundred pound fee!" As far as that went, he would have wired for the whole College of Surgeons if he had thought it his duty, and taken his chance of the workhouse.

Mr. Brownrigg the Grauboschite found his visit very different from what he had anticipated; and, indeed, felt himself very much

de trop. He had been in the habit of regarding places like Royd Hall from their guest-recipient point of view—a kind of gratuitous taverns, or hydropathic establishments, rather, of a refined sort; where, provided always that he behaved sweetly, and tipped the servants liberally, all the currents of Life were to run smooth, and troubles be unknown. But this sudden inroad of Death and Misadventure had changed all that; and while he had to acknowledge to himself that his affection for his hosts had grown much greater since they became, as it were, human as well as merely opulent and amiable, he could not shut his eyes to the fact that the character of his visit had completely changed. Still less could he shut his eyes to that other fact—that he really wasn't wanted. Least of all when he found grounds for suspecting that his hostess was writing to put off other guests! He mooted the suggestion, with all due round-abouting, that he should return to his rooms at Cambridge to-morrow, and come another time.

But he was so sorry for himself that the Rector saw it, and good-naturedly suggested to Mr. Brownrigg that he should pay him a visit at the Rectory for a day or two before going home. Lady Murgatroyd had only postponed her house-party for a few days, just till all these troubles should blow over; and then, who knew but what Sir Alfred Chalis would at least be well enough to be moved before the end of the week? Mr. Brownrigg accepted the invitation *con amore*.

And then, throughout a very cheerless and oppressed Sunday, slightly alleviated by callers, things went on without change. Judith scarcely left her room, and was reticent. Very little allusion was made to yesterday's events by the other members of the family in conversation with one another. It rarely went beyond an inquiry whether Challis had shown any sign of consciousness. None of the family appeared at Church—a very rare event in the annals of Royd.

Towards Judith the attitude of her mother and sister was a perfectly indescribable compromise between toleration and exasperation, good-will towards a blood relation in difficulties, and condemnation without benefit of clergy, all kept in abeyance pending illumination. Probably the freest speech on the matter was Lady Arkroyd's to the Duchess, when the latter, having been told all the facts in full, asked in her brief, incisive way—which none but a Duchess could have resorted to without seeming questionable form, dear!—"What were they up to, Therèse? That's the point!" and her ladyship replied: "Oh, of course we all know perfectly well, Thyringia. Only nobody's to say anything. They were going to

take the wind out of the sails of this precious new bit of legislation by going through a ceremony, at any rate. . . ."

"I see. A honeymoon under protest. I suppose Judith would have come back here and said nothing about it?"

"My dear, I really won't undertake to say what Judith would or wouldn't have done. She would have had to come back for her things, anyhow!"

Thyringia looked amused. Perhaps she was canvassing in her mind the sorry plight of a thingless bride. Many complications would suggest themselves to the mind of a Duchess of experience. "Not so much as a tooth-brush, poor girl!" said she. "However, she could have bought *that* at any chemist's shop. What are you going to do?"

"Why should we do anything? If that Bill passes . . ."

"My dear, it was through Committee in the Lords on Friday afternoon. The Bishop will be black in the face with rage. I shall see him in a day or two, and be able to twit him. Poor Dr. Barham! . . . But I don't see that there can be any marrying now—not till this Sir Alfred gets a divorce. . . . *Can* he?"

"No; he has the most exasperating wife. She *is* his wife now, or will be on Tuesday, if Murgatroyd is right! And she's quite *sans reproche,* as I understand. *Isn't* it a nuisance?"

"Do you *want* Judith to marry this man, Therèse?"

"My dear!—is it likely? But if the girl has set her heart on him, it *is* a nuisance to have him married to a woman who won't commit anything and make it possible. . . ."

"Couldn't he force her to divorce him by . . .?"

"By committing something himself? Oh no!—she's too sharp for that. Of course, she wants to pay them out, and make it all as uncomfortable as possible. I'm sorry for Judith, but I must say it's a great deal her own fault. Oh dear!—why *cannot* people be ordinary and reasonable? Hush!—there she is. . . ."

At the sound of an identifying skirt-rustle descending the stairs, the Duchess dropped her voice to say reflectively: "Yes—why can't the woman misbehave herself, and be hanged to her?" She was silent by the time the rustle reached the door. It was Judith, self-possessed, but pallid, who met a cautious half-approach to the burning subject of the day with, "Now do, dear Duchess, be a good woman, and *don't* ask me questions now. I'm coming over to-morrow, and I'll tell you *all* about it. . . . No, really, I can't tell you about it now, if I try; it only makes my head go round."

On which her Grace, telegraphed to aside by slightly raised eyebrows and an almost unperceptible shrug of Lady Arkroyd's shoul-

ders, that seemed to mean, "You see?—Judith all over. I told you!" merged inquiry in mere commiseration. Oh no—*she* wasn't going to catechize and be odious. Poor child! How ill she was looking! And no wonder! It was all so dreadful. But, at any rate, she, Judith, was not to blame for this terrible mishap. No one would ever believe *that!*

"I'm not so sure even of that myself," said the young lady wearily. And the Duchess made a mental note that this girl really looked her loveliest in trouble. But this girl did not intend to *s'appuyer* on the topic. She had only come in just to say a word of greeting, and that she would come over to Thanes tomorrow. And now she must go and lie down, for her head was simply splitting. No; she knew Mr. Taylor was in the next room with the others, but she couldn't stay to talk even to him. Her mother must make her apologies. For this was in what was regarded as the confidential room of the house—the little cabinet off the first staircase landing, with the suite of buhl furniture that belonged to Cardinal Richelieu, or somebody; and the cinquecento Milanese armour, made for Galeazzo Sforza, who was a Monster of Iniquity. It was always spoken of as "the *mezzanina* room."

This may be enough to make it understood how a complete revelation of the circumstances preceding the accident was still to be made, two days after its occurrence; although pretty shrewd guesses of their general nature were afloat. It was with a sense of relief that Sir Murgatroyd said to his wife, as they came away from Challis's side, satisfied that, for the present at least, his revived powers of speech had lapsed, "Judith has promised to tell me the whole." And it was with a sense of relief that her mother heard him. For the doubt of what story might be still to come was more painful than any probable certainty would have been.

Down in the village and round the Abbey Well, and round Mrs. Fox's cottage and its tenant lying dead, survivors of the Feudal System hung about in groups, and spoke their pristine mother-tongue, an institution that has not been Americanized in Royd, so far. If that tenant's subtenant, the victim or *bénéficiare* of a recent writ of ejectment, was also hanging about, unseen owing to the Nature of Things, he must have lamented the pain he was giving, and the trouble his survivors were having with his residuum. Our interpretation of Jim Coupland's character favours that view, granting the needful assumptions. But, of course, he may have been extinct, whatever that means. Poor Jim!

CHAPTER LII

OF JUDITH'S STATE OF MIND, AND HOW SHE TOLD HER FATHER. BUT DID NOT IMPRESS HIM AS HE WOULD HAVE WISHED. WHO KNOWS WHAT JUDITH WAS? OF A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR TO THE HALL. HOW NO ONE RECOGNIZED MARIANNE. IS MY HUSBAND DYING? A SCENE ON THE BIG STAIRCASE, AND HOW TWO TOFFS WERE FAR FROM ODIOUS. HOW THE NURSE RECOGNIZED ATHELSTAN TAYLOR. HOW JUDITH SAID GOOD-BYE TO CHALLIS. HOW IT CAME OUT WHO MR. KEITH HORNE'S FRIEND WAS

A SLEEPLESS night had preceded that interview between Judith and Challis, and she was not at her best when his wandering speech and cold unrecognition struck a chill to her soul. When a like event occurs—and it does chance, now and again—between folk who have been linked together for a lifetime, and the uninjured survivor, awaiting with the return of consciousness the accents and the look of the affection of a few hours ago, is repelled by the insensate stare of eyes that only see a stranger, the unimpassioned sound of a voice from which all tenderness has vanished, even then the trial is a hard one. But the memory of the past years is too strong to allow belief that the thing will last—it is dismissed as a passing nightmare, as the nurse by the bedside of fever dismisses the wanderings of delirium. It will last its time, and pass away and be forgotten.

A cool judgment and more experience might have told the girl to bear her soul in patience; to treat the wanderings of a brain shaken as Challis's had been as mere sleep-waking. But even had her self-possession been at its best, she had no long-past years of love to look back to, to give her confidence in its return with a returning calm of health. And not only this, but these same wandering words of his had shown how full his soul still was of the past in which she had no share. She had been allowed a peep into her lover's heart, and had felt the force of another love's preoccupation of it. If only his utterances had been stark rambling, mere Tom-of-Bedlam incoherence! But the worst of it was, their outward form was clothed in such a terrible sanity.

There was one thing in it that hit very hard—had a special sting of its own. Judith knew perfectly well about Challis's by-

gones. He had taken her into his confidence about the humble home of the days of his obscurity. His half-humorous reviews of his past had shown her plainly how little hold his first wife Kate—the "Ziz" of his novel—had ever had upon him. He had evidently wedded the wrong sister first. He spoke of Bob's mother with affection, certainly, but it was an affection that was artificial and perfunctory, whereas, even if he had never been passionately in love with Polly Anne—if no volcanic eruption had ever raged on account of this young person, whom Judith would have classed as an insignificant puss—still, that Deceased Wife's Sister seemed to have generated something that was at least a very good working substitute for a *grande passion*. What was the worth of all his protestations to her, Judith, if this memory of the days of Great Coram Street was to be the first resurrection of his mind from its temporary death?

But where was the use of answering the question now? Or any question at all, for that matter? Was not the last chance gone of passing the barrier that held them apart? Well—she had kept her share of the compact. "I am ready, if it can be arranged," she had said. And she had complied with every arrangement, stipulating only that the wedding was to be a mere legal precaution—a formal bar to the creation of a new obstacle by a retrospective mood of the Lords and Commons. It would keep the position unaltered; and that was only fair-play, surely! But now all was changed. She had always been alive to the fact that Marianne *in esse*, legally warranted in the appropriation of her husband's children, and canonically warranted in her paroxysm of sensitiveness to consanguinity, was a very different force to reckon with from Marianne *in posse*, sained and assoilzied by an Act of Parliament.

Did she, we may wonder, ask herself the question: If it were possible, even at this eleventh hour, to get that knot officially tied, and be ready to laugh at the "retrospective action" of the measure that would be the Law of the Land in forty-eight hours, would she be ready to jump at the opportunity? Or, was she not rather relieved at the turn things had taken? However, there was this to be considered:—if the motor accident had not happened, and the wedding had come off, she would never have had to face that blank stare of oblivion, and Great Coram Street! Some women won't marry a widower lest too many tender memories should still be treasured in some secret corner of his heart. That is unreasonable; because the source of them is supposed to be underground, or in Heaven, or in Purgatory, according to the *façon-de-parler* of the moment. But . . . Great Coram Street! And the Deceased

Wife's Sister still undeceased, and to be legalized retrospectively on Wednesday! Be it noted, though, that this is only conjecture! The story has no warrant for saying that any such thought crossed Judith's mind.

She made a clean breast of the whole matter to her father. She told him all about that last interview of hers with Challis at Trout Bend three or four weeks since; and of the arrangement they had made, and confirmed by subsequent correspondence. Challis was to reside for fifteen days at some place far enough from his or her ordinary residence to insure practical secrecy, where there was a parish-priest qualified to receive his affidavit and issue an ordinary marriage-licence. "I forget what he called him," said Judith. "Something like Harrogate." No doubt it was "surrogate." If in Challis's judgment the passing of the Bill should be put beyond reasonable doubt, he was at once to procure this licence, and make every necessary arrangement, keeping her fully informed. He had at first intended to procure a special licence, but had been deterred by someone telling him that such a licence might be refused, or at least delayed. He preferred the idea of dealing with a country parson with whom he could make acquaintance, and to whose local charities he could subscribe liberally. Besides, he could mesmerize that parson. You can't mesmerize Doctor's Commons.

The young lady then narrated, almost more graphically than seemed quite canny under her circumstances, her reception of a telegram the previous evening, fixing the time and place of their meeting in accordance with the terms of a letter of her own, which had told how her brother-in-law had placed the automobile at her disposal. She described the meeting at the Park Gate, minus its salutations; the rapid spin along the mile of road, till they reached the curve; Challis's appeal to the chauffeur for caution, and M. Rossier's contemptuous disregard; the sudden appearance of Jim as the car whirled round the corner; and how Challis, springing to his feet, was shot straight into the road at the very moment when she knew well, although her eyes had left him, that Jim was under the wheels; and then her own dazed condition, that almost grew to stupor as she rode back; and her arrival at home, when her mother, brought out by Elphinstone, simply ran back terrified. The Baronet suspected a shade of exaggeration here, and headed off an indictment of his wife for panic.

"But *why* the motor-car at all?" said he.

"We turned it all over," said the young lady, "and could see no other way. The railway was out of the question. . . ."

"Why?"

"Well—picture me to yourself, meeting a swarm of locals on the platform at Furnival. And fancy my asking for the carriage! Where should I have said I was going? You've no idea, papa dear, what a poor liar I am! Not because I'm truthful, but because I'm stupid. Anyhow, we had taken the trains for granted; and when it came to Bradshaw, we found that to get to this obscure place and back would mean eight hours. And what was worst was that if there had been any accident or delay I should have been stranded till next day—at the Hare and Hounds I believe it would have been, as a matter of fact—and that wouldn't have suited me at all. . . ."

"Yes—yes—you were quite right. How long was it to take with the motor?"

"Within five hours, all told. An hour and three-quarters of car each way. If all had gone well . . ."

"Why did Sir Alfred Challis come to meet you?"

Judith didn't seem over-clear on this point. "He made believe," she said, "that he thought we should lose the way. But I don't believe that was it. I believe the fun of the ride had more to do with it than anything."

The Baronet seemed a little *froissé* by something in his daughter's tone. "It has been a sorry piece of fun for him," said he. "And for you, too, my girl." For he was almost vexed with himself for allowing the inception of a thought of condemnation. See how much she *must* have suffered, this fool of a daughter of his!

"Don't pity *me!*" said she. "But you are a dear, good papa always." There was something in this of her old tone of contrasting her experience with his simplicity. This belief in his pastoral character was a tradition in the family.

Perhaps it was a part of this character that made him feel that a blank was being left in their conversation that at least called for a passing word to fill it in. "This poor fellow's death . . ." he began, taking for granted that Jim Coupland's share in the tragedy would be as prominent in his daughter's mind as his own. But she stopped him with an exclamation of alarm as he hesitated.

"Why should he die?" she cried. "There is no chance of his death. See what the doctors said—both of them. . . ."

He interrupted her. "I was not speaking of Sir Alfred. I was speaking of Jim Coupland—the blind man, who was killed—is it possible you do not know that he died?" For, to hear her speak, no one could have dreamed she knew of that sombre background to a sad day's work, the man lying dead near at hand.

"Jim Coupland!" she repeated; and the tone of her reply grated on her father, to whom the thought of Jim's death was an ever-present burden. Again she repeated, "Jim Coupland!" with a fuller stress on each syllable that all but seemed contempt. "Yes—but what is Jim Coupland . . . compared to . . .?" Then she qualified her words: "Oh, well, of course, one feels all that I suppose one ought to feel, but . . ."

"What what?"

"But it's no use pretending. . . ."

"My dear Judith, I *don't* understand."

"My dear papa, do you mean to say that if you were in my place . . . However, it really is no use talking about it." Her manner was excited and resentful, till she suppressed it with an effort, and calmed down to say: "Suppose we *don't* talk about it!"

There was a symptom of indignation in her father's tone as he replied: "We shall gain nothing by talking at all, Judith, if I am right about your meaning. I may be wrong, my dear"—he softened rather—"but what you *seem* to me to mean, by the way you speak about this poor fellow's shocking death, is . . . well! —in short, is, that you are indifferent to it."

"Is it so very surprising? Would you not think me a hypocrite if I were to profess to be heart-broken about this—this wretched blind cripple, who was the cause of it all?"

This took place in the garden, where the father and daughter had walked apart, to be alone, away from the house. Judith had really been as anxious to speak with him as he with her. But she was not in love with this turn in the conversation. As she stood with bitten lip and flashing eye in front of the wires of a cage containing a sulphur-crested cockatoo—for they were close to the aviary where she and Challis had talked about the parroquets—a hideous shriek from the bird caught her last words, and almost seemed a vindictive endorsement of their spirit.

Her father, to whom the death of the innocent man was a thing that threw all other disquiets into the shade, suppressed whatever he felt of resentment or disgust, and showed only wonderment. "My dear child," said he, "you are not yourself. If you were, you *could* not say such things. I can hardly believe that you realize that the man is *dead* when you speak so." He stopped a moment, puzzled. "I suppose, though, he must have been still alive when you last saw him?"

"Oh yes, he was shouting. But I knew he went under the wheel. I *felt him.*" Her father shuddered, but she seemed calm.

"Did you not see him again?"

"No—that was the last I saw of him. I never looked for him. . . . Well!—I thought Sir Alfred Challis was killed."

The Baronet felt apologetic. "I see, my dear, of course! Yes—yes—that would be so. I suppose the poor fellow must have had life enough in him to get off the road . . . only . . . well!—I don't understand . . ."

"What doesn't my papa understand?" There is again the shade of the old family tradition of patronage in her voice. Disinclination to accept it in this case may have roughened her father's reply a little:

"I don't understand what Taylor said. I'm sure—yes, I'm sure!—he said he found him *lying in the road.* You must have passed him as you returned?"

"Very likely."

"Judith!" This was sudden remonstrance, almost anger. But it softened as it had done before. "Well—well—perhaps it was only natural . . . of course, I am forgetting . . ."

"Perhaps what was only natural? . . . Oh dear!—well, of course I know what you mean—my not being able to go into hysterics over this man's death. The circumstances are what I believe are called touching, no doubt, but . . ."

The Baronet was flushed, and quite angry at this. "The circumstances are what are rightly called touching," he said. "Poor Jim Coupland was coming out to meet him—so I understood the Rector—in the full expectation that he was bringing that dear little girl of his back to him. And he was only bringing the news of her death. . . . What did you say? . . ." For Judith had muttered *sotto voce* that then it didn't matter. But she did not repeat it, saying only, "I said nothing."

Her father did not believe this, and the end of his sentence hung fire, he looking doubtful. So Judith repeated his last words, to start him fresh. "'He was only bringing the news of the little girl's death' . . . you were saying? . . ."

"Yes!—the news of her death. And then this damnable motor-car of yours comes tearing round the corner, with its damned hooting, and he's under the wheels in a moment! I shall tell Frank I won't have the thing in the house again, once he's taken it away. It's simply a horror and an abomination. . . ." And so on. He was in want of a safety-valve, and here it was. The fact was that Judith's apathy about poor Jim had made him feel thoroughly uncomfortable; it was so unlike his measure and conception of what his family ought to be.

As for Judith, she may have felt that sort of alarm at this

impetuous utterance that a child will remain susceptible of in later years, who would laugh at any like explosion of a non-parent. It is an inheritance from the nursery. Impressed by her father's denunciation of the motor-car, or possibly thinking to herself, "No more scenes, for Heaven's sake!" she relaxed so far as to say, formally, "I'm sorry for the little girl." But she spoiled whatever there was of graceful in a grudging concession by adding, "Perhaps that will satisfy you?"

The old gentleman said nothing, but looked at her, puzzled and hurt at what he shrank from thinking her heartlessness; trying to concoct excuses for it that would make her seem less ungracious. For he loved this daughter of his, so much so that even now he felt proud of her rich beauty, none the worse for all her stress and trouble. Indeed, as she stood there, caressing the great white bird that had shrieked—she had taken it as she spoke from its cage, and was kissing its terrifying beak with tenderness—her black mass of hair against its yellow crest; her ivory-white skin against the driven snow of its feathers, each made whiter in its own way by yet another white, the soft folds of a creamy summer dress most late Augusts would have condemned; her beautiful hand in the sun, with the bird's black claw upon its jewels—all these might have said a word in arrest of judgment to a parent readier to disbelieve in his daughter than Sir Murgatroyd. No doubt they influenced him to think that he had succeeded in glossing over what he would have condemned as callousness in one further away from him. But she—as other father's daughters are—was his little girl of twenty years ago grown up. She did not really mean this heartlessness, thought he; it was a sort of *parti pris*—a parade, an affectation!

Was he right, after all? Is the story wrong in its estimate of her? Has it laid too much stress on the hard side of this girl's character—its vanity and love of power? Some moralist has said that no mortal should be called heartless as long as he or she can fall in love. Judith Arkroyd *must* have been in love with Alfred Challis; for see what risks she was running to secure him! Why—yes!—to secure him; that was just it. She *wanted* him, and took the only road to possession that seemed open to her. Now if, when he lay insensible, that time when there was none to see, she had only stooped to kiss the inanimate hand, had even held it till the nurse returned! Should we not have felt more sorrow for her after that, when his returning speech showed how completely she had, for the moment, passed from his mind? No doubt she was in love with him, in one manner of loving. But there are so many!

This story is not going to break its heart about her—to chant dirges over the grave of her share of this *grande passion*. And its commiseration for her grows no mellower from dwelling on the fact it has to record: that exasperation against poor Jim Coupland, to whom she thought proper to ascribe the whole miscarriage of the scheme, was really a source of relief to her—a sort of counter-irritant. To her father, Jim's death and his child's filled the whole horizon—a black cloud. Challis's mishap he did not distress himself about; he would be all right presently—had he not spoken? As for his loss of memory, *that* meant nothing. Did he not himself, when he came round after *his* mishap, ask whether "the trout" had been taken, meaning the fox? Loss of memory was the rule, not the exception, in such cases. And as for the future of Challis and Judith, that was a difficulty there must be some legal way out of. It was incredible that Challis's wife should go on holding him at arm's length, and yet bar his union with another woman. Some solution of that problem could be found, Bill or no Bill! As for opposing his daughter's wishes, if they were really deep-rooted, that he would not do. All his opposition to Challis hitherto had been to him as Marianne's husband. If their marriage could be legally annulled or dissolved, he was not going to stand in the way of his daughter's happiness.

But this anger of hers against Jim showed her as a new Judith, whom he had never suspected the existence of. In her childhood she had been proud and domineering with her brothers and sisters—two elder brothers had died in the army, and a sister was married in India; none of them have crossed this story—but not, so far as her father knew, malignant or revengeful. It gave him a great discomfort at heart; set him wondering which of her ancestors on either side she had harked back to. Was it Josceline de Varennes, who, in one of those spirited middle ages, hid a knife under her bridal pillow and gave her first husband a warm reception to his couch, in order that she should marry Hugh Arkroyd? There was the knife, to prove it, in the glass cabinet with the green-dragon china service. But—as long ago as King Stephen! Oh no!—it was that old fiend of a great-grandmother of Therèse's. Every old family has an ancestral scapegoat, and a certain "Lady Sarah," of the days of the second George, was very popular in this one.

But Sir Murgatroyd scarcely did more than seek for the scapegoat, in case he should be forced to condemn this member of the congregation. He did not pass sentence. He only said gently, "You will feel differently, Judith dear, when you are yourself

again. All this has upset you." In reply to which the young lady said wearily, "We shall see, I suppose, presently. I can't be very demonstrative about either now, though of course it's very sad, and so on, about the little girl." And then she talked to the parrot, kissing him and calling him her darling, and saying now he must go back in his wicked cruel cage. All which her father set down to mere bravado, and thought it best to say no more to her in her present mood. But he had a very serious look on his face as they walked towards the house together.

It was a relief to him to hear the robust musical voice of the Rector in the large drawing-room that opened on the lawn, which was their most natural way back into the house. But Judith paused on the terrace. "Oh dear!" said she. "There's our Father Confessor! I can't stand sympathy, and I don't want to be catechized, thank you! Be a dear good papa, and say pretty things for me!" And then, in spite of an attempt at remonstrance by her father, slipped away; going round by a side-terrace that, ending at the house-corner in a vague architectural effort three centuries old—a Nereid and a Triton and a sink, with an Ionic canopy over all to keep the rain off—allowed of an approach to the main *façade* of the house, and the carriage-drive through the beech avenue in the Park.

But she did not at once carry out her scheme of escape. The shadow of the Ionic canopy was sweet on the base of the sink, and the seat it made was tempting, and the cleanness of its moss and lichens acceptable even to a skirt of *crêpe-de-Chine*. It was only an old dress, too, according to Judith's ideas, so she spent a little time with the Triton and the Nereid before going on into the house. She felt stunned and bewildered, for all she had shown so bold a front, and was glad of rest.

Presently her desire to know that Challis was progressing got the better of a terror that was on her that his oblivion might be lasting. She could hear the voices of the party in the drawing-room still in conversation, the Rector's very distinctly; so she decided that she could slip indoors with safety, and rose to go.

A little diffident gate, that had shrunk away into the heart of a yew hedge, led out to the drive and entrance to the house; and one could see and not be seen there, even by visitors who had been over the ground before. Judith stopped at this gate, not to be caught by an early sample, unexplained. It was not yet twelve o'clock, and there at the door was a vehicle with one horse, steaming. And a lady in black was descending from it, and Samuel evidently meant to let her in. Judith waited for her to vanish,

gave her ample time, more than enough, to be shown into the drawing-room, and then went straight on to the house.

The vehicle was a hired fly from Furnival, whose driver Judith at once recognized as an *habitué* of the railway-station. He was mopping his brow with his handkerchief, for the morning had become very hot; but he put his hat on to touch it to Miss Arkroyd, who of course was very familiar to him. Having done this, he took it off again, and went on mopping. He referred to the dryness of this sort of day pointedly; but Judith missed his subintent, and conceived that the position was covered by the approach of Bullett the groom, with a pail of water for the horse. The lady must have come straight from the train.

Judith looked through the glass door—as *she* thought, carefully—to make sure the great hall at the foot of the stairs was empty. She was quite without conjecture or suspicion as to who the visitor was, or she might not have contented herself so easily that the coast was clear. Anyhow, there was no one visible from where she stood and looked through. So she passed in and walked straight across to the stairs, and so up to the first landing. As she turned the angle, she saw a lady in black, whom she did not recognize, seated in the recess on the left, who rose when their eyes met. Not a bad-looking woman, of a sort, but not self-explanatory.

Count over the times Judith had met Marianne. They do not amount to much—at least, until that evening at the theatre. Two dinners and a visit in London a couple of years ago—consider how little that means to a young lady who may be under an equal social obligation to remember half-a-dozen new faces every day! Consider, too, that in this early time Mr. Challis was in the eyes of this young lady nothing beyond a popular author whose works she hadn't read; and as for his wife, why should she notice her at all? "Which was she, Sib?" we can fancy her asking. Was she, for instance, the underdressed one with the mole, or the rawboned giggler? Then, as to that visit to the play a few months later, think of the exciting pre-occupations! Is it certain that Miss Arkroyd paid as much attention to her hostess as you and I might have thought the circumstances demanded? Anyhow, there had been nothing to fix Marianne in Judith's memory to such an extent that she should recall at once the travel-worn—and trouble-worn—face she hardly glanced at, and would have left without a second look had its owner not risen, as though to speak. She might have done so, nevertheless, if it had not been for something in the visitor's action which suggested a lady kept outside the drawing-room rather than a person allowed inside the house. You know the

sort of difference—the difference between subservient conciliation and conciliatory self-assertion.

What caught and retained Judith's second look was that this person answered to neither description. Her manner was *sui generis,* and the *genus* had in it a touch of something odd that wasn't insanity. Was it desperation? It was creditable to Judith's penetration that she at once dismissed the only idea that suggested itself. An image shot into her mind of Jim Coupland's sister, employed as cook by Challis, humorously described by him more than once. Stuff and nonsense!—out of the question!

"Are you . . . being attended to?" She threw a slight smile of protest into the question, to guard against the possibility of wrong form. If she had mistaken the facts, her hearer would understand the implication of courtesy—no fear of misunderstanding between *us!*

"The young man went in. I can wait." The speaker looked away from Miss Arkroyd. Her manner was not conciliatory. But even then no idea crossed Judith's mind of who she actually was. In fact, prohibitives were at every point of the compass. How could the news have reached Marianne? How could she have come so quick to Royd?

"Is it anything I can do?" This was bald civility on the face of it; almost stipulated that it should be refused. The speaker's arrested foot on the next stair waited to go up when the refusal should warrant it. But it had to wait, long enough to make its owner wonder what was coming.

"Yes!—you can, Miss Arkroyd." Judith's good breeding concealed her surprise. She stood committed, and awaited the instruction. Was this tiresome person going to give it, or be choked by it? It came at last. "You can tell me whether my husband is dying or not."

And then Judith knew that she was face to face with Marianne Challis, the woman she had injured.

Sir Murgatroyd found his wife talking with Athelstan Taylor, of course about the current events. "This is good news about Challis," said the Rector. "Lady Arkroyd tells me he has recovered consciousness."

The Baronet demurred slightly. "Ye-es. At least, he has spoken."

"And not incoherently?"

"N-no. Oh no—not *incoherently.*" But the stress on this word had reservation in it, and her ladyship exclaimed impatiently,

"Oh, my dear, you always make the worst of everything!" A pitying smile, aside to the Rector, was quite a little essay on the unreasonableness of husbands—that intractable class. Mr. Taylor looked from one to the other. It would be early to take sides, but of course the prescribed form in such a case is to help the wife to commiserate her mate's shortcomings. It was safest to endorse the lady's view, provisionally.

"We mustn't expect too much at first," said he, deprecating the crude judgment of inexperience, a quality common to all our family except ourself. "The author won't be in trim for dictating copy for some days to come, I'm afraid." He hesitated a moment, before adding, "You have kept it from him, I suppose, for the present?"

"Mr. Taylor is referring to poor Coupland's death, my dear," said the Baronet. Which his wife resented slightly, as suggesting that her sympathies needed a stimulus. "*Do* you suppose I don't understand that, my dear?" said she *sotto voce*, a reply apart. But she might just as well have left the matter to stand there, and not let herself be betrayed into a candid admission that, in view of the sad end of poor little Lizarann, her father's death almost assumed the form of a Merciful Dispensation. We should be thankful, at least, that he had been spared the hearing of it.

"The whole thing has been terribly sad," said Athelstan Taylor. Indeed, he seemed as if he could hardly bear to speak of it. He turned from the subject abruptly. When could he look forward to seeing Challis without danger of his hurting himself by talking?

Sir Murgatroyd looked inquiry at his wife, and she at him. Then he took the reply on himself, as she seemed very doubtful. "The fact is, Rector," said he, "it isn't by any means certain that he would know you. He can hardly be said to have come to himself yet. What he said to . . ."

"What he said to the nurse was hardly sense," Lady Arkroyd struck in abruptly. No doubt she wanted to keep Judith out of it. But Sir Murgatroyd held to his purpose—would have no evasion or prevarication.

"I was not referring to what he said to the nurse, my dear Thérèse. I was going on to speak of what he said to Judith. What *did* he say to the nurse?"

"Oh, I don't know! Tell it your own way." Lady Arkroyd abdicates.

Her husband did not notice her impatience, but continued: "It happened that my daughter was present when he showed con-

sciousness, and he did not recognize her, and asked for his wife. It was a very singular thing, too, that when Judith told him we did not know where to write to her, he gave the address he lived at several years ago. But I cannot say that seems to me so strange as his non-recognition of Judith, considering . . ."

"My *dear!*" from the lady, remonstratively.

But the Baronet sticks to his colours, though he speaks temperately. "My dear Therèse, Mr. Taylor is so old a friend that I really do think it would be absurd to make any secrets. After all, what does the whole thing amount to? . . ." Here the Rector interrupted him.

"I think it's only fair of me, Lady Arkroyd, to say that I know all about it already. This poor chap—I'm not going to say a word in defence of him—took me into his confidence some weeks ago. That is to say, he sketched as possible the scheme which I now see he and Judith must have attempted to carry out. I tried to dissuade him from it, and, indeed, fancied he had given it up. . . . No; I thought it best to hold my tongue about it, in order to retain my influence with him. He had been speaking freely to me, assuming that what he said would go no farther, and I should only have lost my hold over him by talking to you of it, without any corresponding gain." This was in answer to what was evidently the beginning of a question: "Why was the knowledge of this plan to be kept from *us?*"

However, the Baronet was ready with ungrudging admission that the Rector had acted for the best; his wife with a rather more stinted allowance of assent. Of course, Judith would have gone her own way in any case . . . but still! . . . "Are we not her parents? Should we not have been told on principle?" seemed to be an implication lurking behind lips that had shut it in, and leaking out through a stirring of the eyebrows. Her husband, averse to reserves, and noting this one, said, "What were you going to say, Therèse?"

But Therèse said, "*Do* wait, my dear!" to him, and to the Rector, "Would you excuse me one moment? . . . What is it, Samuel?" The last was because Samuel was in the room with a card on a hand-tray, to be dealt with furtively, if possible, its bearer's mission in life being self-subordination. Being called on to state what it was, he said it was a lady, and might she speak to her ladyship for a moment. This was a metaphrasis, because it was palpably a card, on which her ladyship read to herself the name "Mrs. M. Craik," and seemed none the wiser. Then she handed it to Sir Murgatroyd, who took his glasses to the reading

of it, and said, "No, I don't know the name." Whereupon her ladyship said, "I suppose I must see her. You'll excuse me, Mr. Taylor?" and departed, after instructions to Samuel about the room the lady was to be shown into.

Now, if she had read the name aloud, the chances are that Athelstan Taylor, who had a lively enough recollection of his visit of intercession to Marianne's mother a year ago, would have remembered it. And then Lady Arkroyd would have known beforehand who it was she was on her way to interview.

As it was, she continued quite in the dark about the identity of "Mrs. M. Craik," until, following Samuel at what she thought a sufficient interval to allow of his disposing of the stranger as arranged, she came out upon a scene at the stairfoot in the entrance-hall that taxed her presence of mind; with a result that was not an uncommon one with her, that she could see no way of meeting the demand upon it, except by an appeal to her husband to rescue her. For, ready as she always was to set his judgment aside when doing so involved her in no difficulty, she always looked to him to extricate her when she found herself in a bad one.

"Oh, thank God if he is living . . . if he is only living to speak to me once . . . just once! Oh, do say again that he is not dead. I will never think ill of you again. Oh, do let me go to him where he is now. . . ." Thus far the poor soul had spoken through a deluge of tears, when Lady Arkroyd came out from a side-door, and her mind said to her that if it was to be hysterics, she did wish Sir Murgatroyd would come. But as to exactly who this was, this female in black who was making a scene gratuitously, the thing of all others her ladyship hated, she was for the moment quite at a loss to guess. Of course, a moment's reflection would have made it clear, but, you see, she was so totally unprepared. Her first information as to whom she was speaking with—seeing that she was as much at sea about Marianne's personal identity as Judith had been at first—came from her daughter, standing handsome and impassive on the stairs, above this excited woman; making her seem a suppliant by her own unmoved placidity, and herself almost cruel by the severity of the contrast.

"This is Lady Challis, mamma." Judith's speech quite ignores the tension of the situation—passes it by. "She wishes to go to Sir Alfred. Is there any objection?" What can it matter to the speaker?—is the implication. *Let* her go to Sir Alfred, by all means!

Her mother's breath is fairly taken away. "Lady Challis!" she repeats. And then, as silence seems to wait for something else,

the blankest interjection: "Oh-h-h!" with the minimum of meaning sound can convey.

Then poor Marianne, with no Charlotte at hand to suggest possible ugly interpretations, bursts out, "I am *not* Lady Challis. I am nothing of the sort. Dear Lady Arkroyd—you must remember me?—you came to see me at home. Do let me go—let me go to my husband!"

Lady Arkroyd was puzzled. Perhaps, after all, there had been a mistake at the outset, and there *had* been all along "something against" this impossible wife. Nothing suggested itself to her as a practicable course. This lady had turned to her with a beseeching face, for which she had "Why, of course!" ready in her heart, being quite a good-natured woman, but there were such odd complications afoot she could not utter it. Judith, from her security behind Marianne, was endeavouring to telegraph without audible speech the words "Deceased Wife's Sister"; and, indeed, after two or three repetitions, her mother caught the clue. But she was little, if any, the wiser; and it was then the prompting came to rush for succour to her husband, still talking to the Rector in the drawing-room.

"*Do* you mind my speaking to my husband for a moment first?" Marianne minds nothing, so long as it is on a road that leads to her object, and her ladyship goes quickly away.

"May I leave you alone for a few moments, Lady Challis?" says Judith, going. "Please step in here till my mother returns, and sit down." That is, into the little room off the landing. Judith goes upstairs quickly; and Samuel, always on the watch, officiates as pilot.

Lady Arkroyd walked back into the drawing-room. She looked despair before trusting herself to speech, and the action of her hands laid an imaginary case for despair before the two gentlemen, who stopped talking to hear its spoken particulars. Her husband encouraged revelation by saying "Well?" interrogatively.

"Oh, my dear, what *is* to be done? It's the Deceased Wife's Sister! I wish you would come."

The Baronet gives the slightest of whistles. "Where have you got her?" he asks.

"My dear, she's in hysterics!"

"Yes—but *where?*"

"In the front hall. And Judith is there *with* her!"

"I say, we'd better go." Thus the Baronet to the Rector, who assents without reserve. Observe that this colloquy has gone on in undertones. Not that anyone could hear—they might have

shouted, for that matter—but to endorse the tension of the situation.

Arriving in the hall, and seeing first the place where Judith had been standing, her mother felt a sense of relief. Her absence made the position easier to deal with. But—where was the Deceased Wife's Sister? Samuel explained. He had shown the lady into the *mezzanina* room, as directed. Samuel felt proud of his Italian, over this.

Marianne had not been sorry to be alone again for a moment, after her first effort of self-announcement. She looked out through the window over the rounded slopes, thickly wooded enough to seem a stretch of forest; with the little groups of roe-deer in the glades the beech-woods grudged them, in their ambition to cover the whole land. She saw the wide level lawns, clothed with the grass of centuries, dreaming of the music of bygone scythes, before the days of mowing-machines and their economies of power no man stinted then; the peacocks walking with precision, and satisfied that they were appreciated; the beds ablaze with asters and marigolds, and dahlias, and standard roses still blooming, and proud of their little tickets that told what variety they were. She saw all these, and out beyond them the smoke-cloud of the great manufacturing centre, with its confidence of one day gobbling up the park and its wood and warren, vert and venison, and getting at its coal, and using it up to make steel armour-plates, that shall send other armour-plates to the bottom of the sea. Unless, indeed, civilization collapses; whereof it is not proper form to say—the sooner the better!

All this has nothing to do with Marianne, except, perhaps, as showing what a many things did not cross her mind that might have done so. The whole thing was dim to her, and swam about. Now that the excitement was less, she began to be afraid she might make a fool of herself and faint off, as she did that time with Charlotte Eldridge. She was sorry now that after travelling so far on a very poor breakfast in London, she had not had the sense to get a biscuit or a sandwich at Furnival. When Sir Murgatroyd and her ladyship came into the *mezzanina* room, they found her seated with closed eyes, and alarmingly white. But she rallied at the sound of their voices. Oh no!—she was all right. Now all she wanted was to know about her husband. Was he in danger? Had he been in danger?

The Baronet, in a voice good to banish hysteria in any form, justifiable or otherwise, rather outwent the truth in his testimony. Sir Alfred had never been in any danger at all! Who had told

Lady Challis that story? The old gentleman's pooh-poohing laugh was pleasant to Marianne's ears. Only she didn't feel quite sure she wasn't an impostor. She had come on the distinct understanding—with whom, hard to specify—that Titus was dying. Had she been imposed upon?

"It was in the Sunday paper yesterday," she said. "And I saw it on all the posters at the stations, coming by rail."

"Those damnable newspapers—you'll excuse me, Lady Challis—I should have all the editors hanged if I had my way. Yes, I would indeed! Why, there never *was* any danger! These things happen every day." He went on to narrate how, when his mare Eurydice threw him at Stamford's Croft, he had been carried home unconscious, and remained so over two days. "But your mare had to be shot, my dear," said his wife, vaguely.

When Athelstan Taylor, who had hung back a moment to exchange a few words with the nurse, whom he had met on the stairs coming from Challis's bedside, followed his companions into the *mezzanina* room, he was surprised and pleased to find the Baronet apparently on the most comfortable and communicative terms with the embarrassing lady-visitor. It was all just as if none of the events that made the visit embarrassing had ever happened. Marianne might have been the wife of any neighbour, the victim of a bad accident; who had come at a summons to learn the worst, and was being assured that no bones were badly broken, and the patient in perfect trim for inspection without a shock to the feelings of the most sensitive. The escapade of Challis and Judith might have been a dream, and the terms he had been on with Marianne those of Philemon and Baucis. Ignoring was evidently the order of the day, and the Rector made up his mind to comply with it.

"This is our Rector, Lady Challis," said the old gentleman, introducing him. "The Rev. Athelstan Taylor. I think he will tell you he is just as confident as I am that Sir Alfred will be himself again in the course of a day or two—perhaps in a few hours. Eh, Rector?"

The voice of the big man with the fresh face, sun-tanned with a pedestrian summer, was a new reassurance to the frightened, worn-out woman. It said, filling the little room musically, "Every reason to suppose it, at any rate! I hope we shall all be as lucky if we are ever in as bad an accident, which Heaven forbid!" But an inflexion of his tone contained reference to other injury done in this accident, and made Marianne remember the details in the newspaper. "Was there not a man killed?" she asked.

All looked very sad. "Yes, unhappily," was the joint reply. The Rector began giving some particulars of Jim's death, but stopped. "You were just going up to Sir Alfred," he said. For the general bias of the party in the room, as he entered it, had seemed to be towards migration. The visitor had half-risen from a sofa, but had fallen back as the conversation showed signs of continuing.

Lady Arkroyd and her husband exchanged looks, and appeared to assent to the move. Marianne began to rise again, but with such visible sign of fatigued effort that the other three signalled to one another, so to speak, that this would never do! Lady Arkroyd spoke, preferring to indicate that her husband, with man's proverbial want of tact, was inconsiderately overlooking a guest's comfort. "My dear, I'm sure Lady Challis has had nothing to eat since she left London, and she was travelling all night. She's completely worn out." She added a corollary, "Men forget these things."

The Rev. Athelstan had a suggestion to make: "One minute," said he. "Just let me say . . . I spoke to the nurse just now. She said Sir Alfred had not talked again, but had shown he wanted to get rid of the bandage on his head. She was going to take it off, as she says it isn't the least wanted. Lady Challis would just have time to get a little refreshed while she does it. And then Sir Alfred will be looking quite like himself. You know, there was no visible injury ever, except that scratch on the forehead—just a bit of plaister!"

And thus it came about that Marianne Challis was taking a cup of black coffee and a biscuit, but nothing else, thank you, in the house she had refused to follow her husband to over a year ago, at the very moment that his second return of consciousness prompted him to ask again for Polly Anne.

Judith, barely pausing to see that Marianne was "shown in" to the side-room—because it is not enough to know which door; you have to be properly shown in by a servant—had gone quickly to the patient's room, meeting the nurse by the way. She stopped her.

"Is Sir Alfred Challis conscious?"

"I think a little more so. He hasn't spoken, but he evidently wants that bandage off his head. I thought it might be better to mention it before taking it off. Not that I'm really afraid of the responsibility. Only it's as well to be on the safe side. Is Lady Arkroyd downstairs?"

"I think she's just coming up. Sir Alfred's wife is here."

"Oh, indeed. I hope she won't upset him. I shall find Lady Arkroyd downstairs. . . . Oh, by-the-bye, Miss Arkroyd, what did your mother say was the name of the big parson—Reverend what?"

"Reverend Athelstan Taylor."

"I thought so." And the nurse, a well-defined and explicit person, went downstairs as Judith passed on along the lobby.

The figure on the bed was moving slightly as she entered the room, feeling how venturesome her conduct was; and was evidently fidgeting, as the nurse had said, about the bandage. She went up and stood beside him, hiding a kind of desperation under an immovable exterior. Should she speak to him by name? If so, by what name? As his memory was playing such tricks, might not his present style and title be strange to him? Besides, she had never called him "Sir Alfred." And if she called him "Scroop," as she had done almost throughout, and *still* he did not recognize her, how then? But surely he was speaking again!

"You're very good—but what am I being kept here for? I say! —I hope Polly Anne's all right. . . ."

"Please don't pull at that bandage; it shall be taken off as soon as the nurse comes back. Why shouldn't 'Polly Anne' be all right?" She couldn't help the inverted commas.

"Because she hasn't come. Did you send to the address I gave?"

Judith replied stonily, "Your wife is here. She will come directly. . . . Listen! Do you not know me?" For she knew how short their time must be; how brief and abrupt the farewell that had to be packed into it, whatever form it might take. She did not certainly know whether she hoped he would say "Yes."

He kept her waiting, to turn his eyes full on her and consider the point. "N-n-n-no!" said he, prolonging the first letter. "I don't *think* I do." His civil manner was heart-rending to the woman beside him. Recollect that only three days before, though they would not have become *de facto* man and wife, their compact of marriage would have been irrevocable! He kept his eyes still on her with a puzzled look, adding immediately after, "Could you not tell me of something to remind me?"

What to remind him of, and avoid all claim of tender memory for the past, in view of the fact that he might disallow that past altogether!—that was Judith's difficulty. She must keep to suggestions prosaic and bald—just the colourless events of daily life. She tried to speak with absolute calm indifference, tempered by good-will.

"Is it possible you do not remember this room—the room the Ger-

man Baroness saw the ghost in?" She made a not too successful attempt at a laugh over this. "Why!—you slept here before!"

"Where is 'here'?"

"My father's house, Royd Hall. I am Judith Arkroyd."

Challis's voice and manner were like his old self again as he answered, "I do feel so out of it!" and laughed a sort of apology. "I'm horribly ashamed. I shall have to ask Polly Anne to jog my memory. Is she coming?"

"Oh yes—she's coming." Judith had hard work to refrain from breaking out "Have you forgotten Trout Bend and the convict's bridge; the little Tophet garden and the letter, and all my shawl in a blaze? Have you no memory of the play you wrote for me to play in; of your fatuous declaration of a passion a man of your sobriety should have been ashamed of; above all of our meeting of two days since, our reckless race along the sunlit road, and its tragic ending?" But she knew all this, that her tongue was itching to remind him of, was good for oblivion only; knew it by a thousand tokens, most of all by the revelation chance had given of the background of his mind. Even the knowledge that all fruition of their crazy scheme was perforce at an end was as nothing compared to that. Therefore she felt it safest to say curtly that Marianne was coming, and to add that the nurse would be back in a moment to remove the bandage.

Challis closed his eyes again with a tired sigh. "I can't trust myself to talk," said he. "All sorts of things keep coming into my head, and convincing me I must be out of my senses. But I'm clear about one thing. Someone is being very kind to me. I have a general impression that I don't deserve it, and I want to thank . . . want to thank . . ." He seemed to give it up as a bad job, and to relapse into half-stupor.

Judith was fast coming to the conclusion that the sooner she and Challis saw the last of one another the better for both. But "to part at last without a kiss!" The words of Morris's poem came into her mind. Well—suppose in this case we were to say, "without a handshake"? That would be quite enough. At least, that knight beside the Haystack in the Floods would have known whom the kissed lips belonged to. Challis's disordered head had constituted him a stranger to her. All the same, to have the tale of their love end on a blank and vanish, and none write a word of epilogue—not so much as a bare *finis!*—grated on her sense of the fitness of things. She would just try to print the word herself, without provoking an appendix. If he was insensible again and did not hear her, what did it matter?

"The nurse will come directly," she repeated. "I have to go now. Good-bye!"

He opened his eyes again, rousing himself. "Oh—good-bye—good-bye!" said he. "I am sorry you have to go." He took her hand, shaking it frankly and warmly. She was afraid the touch of her own hand might bring back the past—the useless past—and almost stinted to return its pressure.

She turned in the doorway, and said, referring to footsteps approaching the room without, "Perhaps you will know this gentleman who is coming now, and he will tell you who I am." A bitterness in her heart made the last words come, and then she said to the nurse and Athelstan Taylor, who was with her, "He's been talking again, quite like himself, only he doesn't know me from Adam. But I fancy he'll soon be all right."

"That's good hearing," said the Rector cheerfully. "You'll find the Duchess downstairs. She's asking for you, to take you to Thanes."

"Oh, is she? I think I shall put my things on at once, and go with her." She went to her room and rang for her maid, whom she sent with a message to the Duchess. She would be ready in five minutes, she said, and meant to stop the night.

When the little handmaiden had finished her ministrations, and her mistress and the Duchess had driven away, she was found in tears by a fellow-servant, and explained them by saying Miss Judith was angry with her. Because she had never once called her Cintilla, but only Clemency, which was merely her proper name.

"My dear sir," said Challis to the Rector, standing by his bed, "you say, 'Don't I know you?' And you say it so confidently that it convinces me I *ought* to know you. But I can't say I do. Honour bright!"

"Never mind! Don't try to think about it. You'll come to rights presently. Let this good lady get that thing off your head. The best thing you can do is to lie still."

So Challis lay still and listened to the conversation. And this is what he heard:

"I hadn't flattered myself you would remember your humble servant, Mr. Taylor, but I felt pretty sure you wouldn't have forgotten the incident."

"I wasn't likely to do that. Faugh!—I've got the flavour of the place upon me still. That antiseptic sack and rubber gloves!—all the horror of it! But apart from that, the story the creature told was such a queer one."

"Seal of confession, I suppose?"

"Hardly that! But not, perhaps, to be repeated except to serve some special end. I understood he left it to my discretion."

"I had no motive but curiosity. Don't tell me!"

"How came you to remember my name?"

"I didn't. Miss Arkroyd told it me. I remembered your look when I showed you into the ward. But I ought to have remembered your name, because I posted Dr. Crumpton's letter to you . . ."

"I remember. It was to ask which of his aliases this man had given me. They didn't know what name to bury him under."

"Oh, I remember . . . Thomas Essendean. No, it wasn't that. That was one they rejected. What was it he told you?"

"Kay Thorne, or perhaps *Key*—*Key* Thorne. . . . What?" For Challis, by this time bandageless and ready to receive visitors, but evidently glad to keep his head down on the pillow, had uttered an exclamation, without opening his eyes. "What's 'hullo,' Challis?" said the Rector. For a moment, he felt afraid that the patient's mind was wandering. But only for a moment. For when Challis spoke again, it was quite quietly and collectedly.

"Name of my first wife's first . . . no!—I don't mean that. Name of a friend of mine eight—ten—years ago. Not Kaith; *Keith* Horne. He wasn't a shining light. He came to awful grief in the end. Penal servitude, I believe. . . ."

"You mustn't tire yourself with talking," said the nurse. "We shall have her ladyship up directly. You know she's coming?"

"Oh no!—might my wife come? Her ladyship can come afterwards."

The Rector understood. He glanced at the nurse indicatively. "Mrs. Challis had better come first," he said. Then he said goodbye to Challis, and went his way. In the passage was Lady Arkroyd, followed by Marianne. "You'll find him immensely improved," said he. "I can't say he remembered me, but he will next time."

Then, as he shook hands with the scared and bewildered lady in black, he thought to himself, "Now, what a queer story I could tell you, if I didn't feel that the right course is to keep a lock on my tongue!"

For it had just come home to him that Marianne was *not* Challis's Deceased Wife's Sister at all, because "poor Kate" had never been his Deceased Wife. She was the late Mr. Keith Horne's! And as regarded the "living in sin business," evidently *she* was the real Simon Pure, and Marianne a mere pretender!

CHAPTER LIII

A POSTSCRIPT. MR. AND MRS. ATHELSTAN TAYLOR. MR. AND MRS. BROWNRIGG. ODDS AND ENDS OF SEQUELS. THE DREAM VANISHES, READABLE BITS AND ALL!

"It's a magnificent match, and she'll make a perfect Duchess," said the Reverend Athelstan Taylor a twelvemonth later—only six months ago at this present time of writing. "And Thyringia will make a perfect dowager. But the old Duke may live to see a grandchild or two. Doesn't do to count one's coronets before they're hatched—eh, Addie?"

"I do wish, Yorick dearest, you would be a little less secretive, and tell me what she really said that time."

"I *have* told you, sweetheart, all there was to tell. I haven't been keeping anything back."

"Never mind! Tell it again."

"Well—it was just like this." He dropped his voice to sadness, as in deference to something sad outside the matter of his speech. "I had just come from reading the service over poor Jim and . . ."

"Darling little Lizarann! Oh, Yorick, I don't believe I shall ever love my own child as . . . " The speaker could not utter another word; and, indeed, her tears were not the only ones that had to be got clear of before the Rector could proceed. In time he got on with his twice-told tale; but their subjugation overlapped his words that followed:

"Well—it was *then!* I dare say the young woman didn't mean to be supercilious and provoking, but she *was*. Why couldn't she leave the funeral alone? She hadn't come to it, and no one had asked her to do so. . . ."

"I don't believe there were half-a-dozen people in the village that didn't."

"Very likely not. But I wasn't going to take her to task for it. *She* began. Talked of it as if it had been a public meeting! Had heard there was quite a large gathering at Blind Jim's funeral. 'You were not there,' said I, simply as a matter of fact. But I suppose she felt there was a cap that fitted, for she said: 'I thought

you would think the family quite sufficiently represented by my father and mother.' I answered—and I dare say my manner was rather irritable—'I wasn't counting heads, Judith.' She said, with a disagreeable shrewdness: 'But you noticed my absence?' 'If you ask me,' said I, 'I did notice it; and of all your family, I think, under the circumstances, your presence was the one most called for.' She replied, with that exasperating placidity she is such a mistress of: 'Possibly some persons acquainted with the whole story might have thought a parade of emotion uncalled for on my part.' I said, rather angrily: 'No one expects a parade of emotion from you, but only the common debt all are ready to pay to the memory of a fellow-creature tragically killed—especially those who have had any share, however indirect, in his death! She replied: 'I don't think we need make any pretences. You know as well as I do what share this man had in frustrating an object I had at heart; and at least you cannot expect me to be grateful to him?'"

"You were alone, then?"

"Yes—her mother had gone on in front. My answer to her was substantially that, if she knew what I knew, she would think poor Jim a benefactor, instead of bearing a grudge against him. 'What do you mean?' said she. 'Please don't be enigmatical.' I then told her bluntly what her position would have been had her proposed marriage with Challis been put into practice—been acted on. I told her of the legalism under which the validity of Challis's marriage with Marianne would stand or fall, according as his previous marriage was void or otherwise; and that it *was* void, as his first wife's husband was living when he married her. I must say I admired her self-possession when she heard what a precipice she had been on the edge of. . . ."

"What did she say?"

"She paused in her walk with a sort of 'what-next-I-wonder?' look on her face, and a slight 'oh—*really!*' movement of the head. Then she walked on again, as before; merely saying, as coolly as if she were talking of a new dress—more coolly—'The marriage laws are too funny for words.'"

"What did you say?"

"I said they were; feeling free to do so with dear Gus at Tunis. But I saw that she was perfectly well aware what a narrow escape she had had. However, she'll forget all about it when she's a Duchess. It's a pity he's so much younger than she is."

"Will the Challises ever know Marianne was his wife all along?"

"I hope not. It would break Marianne's heart. Her belief in

her sister would be shaken. Now they're so happy together again it would be a grievous pity she should know anything about it. She's quite content with the retrospective working of the new Statute. Enough is as good as a feast. . . ."

This was not the end of the conversation. But the story sees that it was to blame for not telling some more of the antecedent circumstances that had made it possible, and now hastens to make good the deficit. The Rector can wait.

Bishop Barham had been as good as his word. He allowed a reasonable time to elapse after the passing of the Act legalizing marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister, and then towards Christmas addressed a letter of paternal remonstrance to the Rector of Royd, "pointing out" some contingent effects of the Act which it was his duty, as that reverend gentleman's Diocesan, to lay stress upon in the interests of public decorum, as the slightest laxity in such a matter might have an injurious influence on the morality of clergy and laity alike. He was not suggesting for one moment that any infraction of moral law whatever was contemplated, or was even conceivable, in the present case. But a well-defined rule of life had to be observed by persons on whose part the slightest deviation from the strict observance of an enjoined conformity may act injuriously on the community. Here the prelude ended, and the Bishop came to the scratch. He could not shut his eyes to the fact that the Rev. Athelstan's household consisted only—children apart—of himself and a lady, the sister of his deceased wife. Since the recent lamentable decision of the Legislature to remove all legal restriction on marriages of persons so related, thus placing the Canon Law of the Church at variance with the Law of the Land, there would be no doubt that Mr. Taylor's domestic arrangements laid him open to censure, and might easily give rise to a serious public scandal. There was no doubt they transgressed the general rule which decides that persons marriageable but not married shall not be domiciled alone together, however circumspect their conduct may be. The Bishop contrived to hint that it was impossible to say where youth and susceptibility ended, and a grouty and untempting elderliness began, and that on this account especially his remarks applied in this case. Aunt Bessy was palpably neither Lalage nor Doris, but the principle held good all the same. He therefore, *et cetera.*

The Rev. Athelstan bit his lip and flushed angrily as he read the gratuitous insult to Aunt Bessy, who, although prim and intensely conservative, was not yet thirty-eight—for the two things

are compatible—and immediately wrote as follows in answer to the Bishop:

"My Lord,

"I can only interpret your letter as enjoining upon me one of two courses. Either my sister-in-law must reside elsewhere or become my wife. But I understand that the Canon Law of the Church still discountenances marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister; and, further, that by a special clause of the recent Act nothing therein relieves a clergyman from any ecclesiastical censure to which he would have been liable previously for contracting such a marriage.

"If your Lordship will guarantee me against ecclesiastical censure for so doing, I will (having first ascertained Miss Caldecott's views on the subject) make arrangements for our marriage at an early date, with a view to removing the scandal you complain of.

"If your Lordship can be prevailed on to officiate at the wedding, I shall regard your doing so as the best security I can have against ecclesiastical censure hereafter."

To which the Bishop's reply was:

"Dear Mr. Taylor,

"It is my Episcopal duty to point out to you that such a marriage as you indicate, though legal, would be now, as always, contrary to the Canon Law of the Church, and in my opinion repugnant to every feeling of Christian morality. I refrain from using the adjective I am tempted to apply to it.

"But as I hold it to be consistent with my conscience as a Churchman to defer to public opinion when it coincides with my own, I am inclined to accept as well-grounded the view that households such as your present one may become the subjects of unfavourable comment, as a consequence (although the least pernicious one) of the recent Act of Parliament. I trust I have expressed clearly what I conceive to be your obvious duty alike as a Christian pastor and a member of Society.

"With regard to the concluding paragraph of your letter, I make no reply, except that in my opinion it calls for an apology.

"I am, etc.,

"Faithfully yours,

"Ignatius Nox."

The Rev. Athelstan showed both these letters of the Bishop to Adeline Fossett, his adviser in difficulties from boyhood, when that

lady came to pay a visit to the Rectory a week before Christmas, when she could not come, because of leaving her mother alone. Families cohere at Christmas, as long as they are plural, and can. The cohesion of a unit is involuntary and continuous.

Now, Miss Fossett's opinions had been much modified when the debate in the Peers enlightened her about the views of the Roman Church, which—she inferred—is quite willing to marry all the sisters of the largest families successively to any *bona fide* widower. Possibly the Sacrament of Marriage might be refused to a man who had murdered his last wife in connection with his suit for her sister's hand. But *Amor omnia vincit.* Could the solemn rite be refused to him if he brought the ring in his pocket to the scaffold, and the Registrar was in attendance?

However, that has nothing to do with Adeline Fossett. She, to be brief, laughed at the Bishop's letters. The story has told how delighted she would have been to unite in marriage her two friends, whom she had long ago destined for one another, only the well-laid scheme ganged agee. And here she had the Pope and the Duke of Norfolk to back her, if consanguinity cropped up again! Clearly Yorick's destiny was to marry Aunt Bessy, and be happy. Unless he hated her, of course!

The Rector laughed his big laugh. "Oh no, I don't hate Bess!" said he. "I'm very fond of Bess—I *am.*" And then he laughed again, and seemed immensely amused.

"Look here, Yorick! Don't be a goose. She's in the next room. Just you go in and tell her your idea, and see what *she* thinks. Do, dear boy! Only you mustn't be as cold as Charity, you know!"

"All right. I'll do justice to the position."

"You will?—promise! . . . Very good. Now, Yorick—Yorick—*dear* old Yorick! See what I'll do! I'll give you my blessing and God-speed!" And then she took him by both hands and kissed his face. He would have liked to return the kiss; but, then, you see, it would have impaired the elder-sister tone.

Was Adeline Fossett aware how she had put the last nail in the coffin of that little scheme, when she presumed on their mock-fraternity in that dangerous way? Why—she wasn't even his Deceased Wife's half-Sister, Marianne's relation to Challis!

She sat and listened for what she expected to go on in the next room. But it came not. As she waited there—a fair distance from the door, not to be eavesdropping—she looked more than ever as if she might have married. Her colour went and came as Hope

rose and fell; and every little chance that Yorick's voice was going to be less good-humoured and genial, and come from his heart with a proper sound of love in it, made her own heart pause on a beat. But, alas!—the voices only went on as before. Oh dear!—would nothing come of it, after all?

It went on for a long time, that talk. And till half-way through that time there was hope on the face of the listener, following its sounds without distinguishing a syllable. Then the irritating *bonhomie,* the equable fluency of the masculine tones, the vexatious household dryness of the feminine ones, became maddening to ears that expected at least cordial warmth. Oh, if she could only enter unseen, and prompt the apathy of the speaker! She bit her lip with vexation, and found it difficult to resist the temptation to listen outright. Surely Yorick must have reached the crucial point by now! Or were they, after all, talking of something else all the while? . . .

There, *that* was emphasis, anyhow! And any evidence that the topic had been fairly broached was welcome. Only, the warmth was on the wrong side; it was Aunt Bessy's voice for one thing; and, for another, was a good deal more like indignation than affection. Now, very likely you know that, when something you cannot hear is repeated several times, it becomes audible however honourably determined you may be not to listen to it. At about the third repetition Miss Fossett, though she sincerely believed she hadn't been listening, had become aware that the phrase was, "Why can't you make her marry you herself?" and, moreover, that her own self was the one referred to. Her heart went with a bound, and her breath got caught in a gasp; and then, somehow without sense or reason, her hair had got loose and come down, and she was getting it arranged at the mirror over the chimney-piece, with the bevelled edges and the ebony frame, and trying to make out she had never begun to cry, when Yorick came back into the room, saying: "What do you think Bess says, Addie? She says if I were to ask you, you would marry me yourself." She didn't know precisely what reply she made. But she certainly had no grounds for complaining of the coldness of the Rector's reception of it.

When, five minutes later, Miss Caldecott followed her brother-in-law into the room, the lady and gentleman were still before the looking-glass, apparently very much pleased. And the latter, without taking his arm from the waist of the former, said: "I say, Bess, what a ghastly couple of fools we have been!" and broke into one of his big laughs.

"Speak for yourself, Athel!" said Aunt Bessy, rather stiffly.

"I didn't mean you. I meant Addie."

"Speak for yourself, Yorick!" said Addie; and made believe to detach herself, but did not insist. Then Aunt Bessy kissed her twice on each side, and the two children, coming into the room from the garden, off an excursion, said, "What's this faw?" and seemed to think some new movement was afoot, which would probably be beneficial in the main ultimately. They accepted partial explanation, however, fuller particulars being promised in due course, and went away to have their things off.

A day or two later Aunt Bessy, being alone with the bride-elect, cleared her throat in an ominous way, as one does when one has something of importance to communicate. Miss Fossett, who in the previous twenty-four hours had twice said to the Rector, "What *is* the matter with Bess? I'm sure there's something brewing," became aware that she was going to be enlightened about this mystery, and waited, open-eyed. Revelation followed, conscious of importance, but sometimes at a loss for phraseology.

"I think, my dear Adeline, I may speak freely to you on a subject which nearly concerns my own happiness." Adeline pricked up her ears, and the speaker, feeling she had made a good beginning, cleared her throat again less poignantly, and continued: "When dear Athel talked that silly nonsense to me the other day . . . you know what I am referring to, dear Addie?" Yes—Addie knew. "Well . . . I did not then know with any certainty the sentiments entertained towards myself by . . ."

"By? . . ." said Addie, and waited.

"By a gentleman who is very slightly known to you—so slightly that, though no doubt you know him by name, you will hardly . . ."

Addie, suddenly apprehensive, thought in a hurry, clapping her hands to help recollection. The moment she lighted on the name that was eluding her, she pointed straight, as at a convicted delinquent. "Mr. Brownrigg," said she firmly.

Miss Caldecott excused what no accusation had been brought against. "I know," said she, "that the name is not a showy one; but the family is old, and his scientific attainments indisputable. He has recently been appointed to the Chair of Logic and Mental Philosophy in . . ."

"But, my dear Bess, his opinions! And why didn't you tell us?"

"His opinions, my dear, are generally misunderstood. And as to why I did not tell you, how could I, when I did not know myself? I only wish that when dear Athel . . ."

"Took my advice and made a goose of himself—I know. I plead guilty. Yes . . ."

"Well—I wish I had then been able to speak with . . . a . . . certainty of this . . . a . . . possible arrangement. But it was only when I referred to the change in Athel's plans that Mr. Brownrigg . . ."

"But you haven't seen him since I . . . since our engagement . . . Oh, Bess!—you wrote off to him at once."

"I did nothing of the sort." Dignity was manifest. "I was writing to Mr. Brownrigg on *quite* another subject, and referred to it incidentally. It was only last night that I got his answer in reply, and I think it need be no secret that it contained an offer of marriage, very beautifully and clearly expressed. He pointed out that, however painful it might be to me to relinquish the charge of my sister's children, even to a step-mother who is already almost as much a mother to them as myself . . ."

"Oh, Bess dear, I *will* molly-cosset over Phœbe and Joan. I will, indeed!"

"You'll spoil them, Addie. But that's neither here nor there. Mr. Brownrigg went on to point out that I could now consult my own welfare and his, without any detriment to the interests of the two children." At this point Miss Caldecott became quite natural, saying: "He would never have asked me, Addie, as long as he thought I was wanted here." In which few words Miss Fossett saw more of the little drama that had been going on in the last six months than in all the rest put together.

"But his opinions, my dear, his opinions!" said she. "However will you get on with his opinions? I thought he was an Atheist, and all sorts of things."

Miss Caldecott replied that whoever had said such a thing of Mr. Brownrigg had libelled him grossly. The exact contrary was the case. No one ever approached sacred subjects in a more reverential spirit than Mr. Brownrigg. She was not qualified to repeat his elucidations of the great German Philosopher he had such an admiration for. But he had been able to point out even to her humble understanding that the question whether there was or was not a supreme Being turned entirely on the meaning of the verb to Be, which was at best a finite Human expression. Miss Caldecott scarcely did justice to all her suitor's exponency of the Identity of the Highest Atheism with the Highest Theism.

She had, however, been specially impressed with a chapter from Graubosch's "Divagationes Indagatoris," of which he had read her his translation. In this the following passage occurs: "The

Thinker of the Future will do well to turn his attention to the construction of a language expressly adapted to deal with the Unknown and Infinite. At present our vocabulary is based entirely, so far as we understand it, on things within our comprehension, and even its meanings are not invariably a subject of unanimity. Until we possess such a language our efforts to grapple with the Essentially Incomprehensible must be futile, of necessity. It would be a step in the right direction if all schools of Thought could agree as to the nature of the Agency to which the Known and the Unknown, the Finite and the Infinite, are alike to be imputed. The selection of a name for this Agency has been the subject of a good deal of crude and unphilosophical discussion in ages less enlightened than the one the New School of Thought proposes to inaugurate. So much so that many nomenclatures have used more than one name for the same Person or Entity; one of the number being occasionally kept secret, as being Unpronounceable; although in this case difficulties must have arisen about divulging it. Pending agreement among the various branches and affiliated Societies of the New School as to the Nature and Extent of the Unknown; the original promoter of Causation; and the terms on which his Instigator, if any, had himself qualified for Existence, we should not discountenance, but rather sanction, the use of the vulgar terminology, such as Gott, God, Dieu, Deus, Zeus, and so on. No doubt within the near future a Lexicon or Dictionary of words and phrases applicable to things beyond our cognizance will be put in hand, and until the publication of this Thesaurus Novus we may safely discourage heated argument on subjects with which our present resources in language do not qualify us to deal. Possibly an absolute silence, and a consciousness of our own insignificance, may be the safest attitude to assume towards the Infinite, pending the issue of the volume. And during this interim, it would appear to be the safest policy to fall in with the apparent scheme of the Visible Creation; and to comply, so far as our information goes, with the Will of its Creator."

Had Miss Caldecott been able to repeat all that Mr. Brownrigg had pointed out to her, Miss Fossett would no doubt have perceived that no danger to religion or morality could possibly accrue from reasonings that had such a happy faculty of landing in the *status quo*.

Towards the conservation of which Miss Caldecott, as she explained to her friend, had been able to contribute. "I am sure, dear Addie," she said, "that I may rely on your rejoicing with me that I have prevailed upon Mr. Brownrigg to abstain, in the

publication of this translation, from the intention he had of spelling Him and He with a little H. I mean, when reverence for established usage prohibits what he speaks of as 'lower-case type.' He at once assented to my wishes, saying that in view of the issues involved, to persist in his intention would be to pursue a —what did he call it?—'a policy of pin-pricks.' That was it."

In the sequel Mrs. Brownrigg eventuated, in the place of Miss Caldecott. And she and her husband are a happy couple at this date of writing. They have discovered a *modus vivendi,* and are highly satisfied with it.

That is how it was that the conversation with which this chapter opened became possible. Let it proceed:

"Do *you* think Sir Alfred's last book is so much worse than his others, Yorick?"

"I can't say it struck me so. If it is, it's not because of his knock on the head; because it was all written three years ago, and has been lying in a drawer. But the reviewers—he was talking about it himself yesterday evening—always take for granted that every book is the work of the last twelvemonth. He read me some of what he has just written, and it seemed all right to me. That Bob of his is a delightful boy, only too sweeping in his views. It is not true that all reviewers are asses, or that they never read the books they criticise. Bob came with him to see me off."

"How do they like Sussex Terrace?"

"Very much. At least, they will when they are settled. It's a splendid big house. I think he was glad to leave the Hermitage, for more reasons than one. . . ."

"I know one. What were the others?"

"Which is the one you know?"

"Mrs. Eldridge."

"Yes—she was one. But I suppose the chief one was *the* one. Anything to get rid of what brought the story back. He has never spoken of it again to me."

"Not since that one time?"

"Yes—long ago now! When was it?—over a twelvemonth. He described how it all came back to him." The Rector extemporized a sympathetic shudder, and made an excruciated noise; both very expressive. "You see, in his oblivion, he was simply hungering for the coming of this wife he had quarrelled with, and remembering her as in her early days . . ."

"Oh, it was hideous! Just fancy the memory of Judith Arkroyd coming back to him!"

"Yes—as he told me himself—with the arms of his wife round him whom he had been longing for! He told me all about it—how he had said to her: 'What for, Polly Anne? What am I to forgive you for?' Because, don't you see, sweetheart? . . ."

"Oh yes—I see."

". . . Don't you see, she was crying over him, and all contrition for her own share of the business. She said to him—so he told me—'It was all my fault, love. If only I had never posted that letter!' He said, 'What letter?' and she said, 'The letter with the postscript.' And then all on a sudden he remembered everything, from the beginning. He could hardly bear to speak of it. . . . I've told you all this."

"Little bits come out that you haven't told. Go on!"

"He said he was afraid he should go mad, and had an idea that clinging to his wife would save him. 'I was simply,' said he, 'on fire with shame and intense terror of what I might remember next. I felt defenceless against what might be sprung on me out of the past.'"

"Did he say anything about Judith?"

"Neither of them mentioned her. That I understand. When they spoke of the motor-car, they seem by common consent to have left it a blank who was in it. He said to her: 'But the man in the road—Blind Jim—was he hurt?' And then she had to tell him of Jim's death, and the dear little thing, and he was so horror-struck that she was afraid he would slip back, and went for help. He had a very bad time—a sort of attack of delirium—and the doctor had to give him morphine."

"Did she tell him anything of Judith at the inquest—and all—and all the share she had in it, you know?"

"The inquest was next day."

"So it was. Of course! But was he ever told about her? Did you tell him?"

"Why—n-no! I rather shirked talking about it, that's the truth."

"But you told him that odd thing . . . you know?"

The Rector's voice dropped. "I know what you mean. The child's voice, and 'Pi-lot.' Yes, I told him."

"Was he impressed?"

"Ye-es—well!—perhaps not exactly in that way. But he thought it very curious, and wanted me to send it to the Psychical Society."

"Shall you?"

"Hm! . . ."

"Shan't you?"

"I think perhaps not. I don't feel quite like having it publicly discussed. I dislike being cross-examined. However, we might think about that." He said this with the manner of one who adjourns his subject, and then, as though to confirm the adjournment, went back on a previous question—the last one easily to hand. "No—she's an odd character, Judith. You know I shall always say there was something magnificent about it."

"Something detestable," said his wife. A side comment, half *sotto voce*.

"Well—not lovable, I admit. But fancy the girl saying what she did in the face of all that crowded room full of people—in the face of their indignation, mind you!—for no secret was made of it."

"She ought to have been ashamed of herself. What was it she said to the coroner?"

"When he had stuttered through his remonstrance or reprimand, or whatever he meant it for? Oh, she let him finish, and then said with the most absolute tranquillity—not a ruffle!—'Possibly. But I should do the same thing, under the same circumstances, I have no doubt, another time.' The poor coroner hadn't a chance. It was just like a respectable greengrocer trying to reprove Zenobia or Cleopatra."

"*I* shouldn't have thought so."

"I suppose that means that I'm a man?"

"That was the idea."

"It proves what I say, then—that there should always be women on juries. However, she and Rossier had a narrow escape. They might have found themselves in a very unpleasant position."

"He wept, didn't he, and sheltered himself behind mademoiselle?"

"Well, he said, 'Qu'ai-je pu faire, moi, contre mademoiselle? Que pouvez-vous faire, messieurs, vous-mêmes?' They didn't understand him, of course, and Felixthorpe softened him down in the translating."

"Didn't the dear old Bart. try to apologize her away?"

"Yes—he tried to suggest that she saw me coming, and knew I should attend to poor Jim. But when the jury went over the ground, they saw that was utterly impossible. . . Well!—she'll be a fizzing Duchess, as Bob Challis would say."

A pause followed, and then the Rector showed signs of sleepiness after a tiring day, asking whether it wasn't getting on for bedtime. And he had a right to be tired, because he had risen sud-

denly from dinner to go over to see old Mrs. Fox, at a summons conveyed by Jarge, the bee-tender, who had made shower the old dame was doyin'. She wasn't, and is still living, we believe. But the Rector had not got back till near ten, when he was glad of his comfortable day's-end chat with his wife. The news of Judith's engagement to the Duke's heir had come that morning, and had met him on his return from a visit to London, which he had left by an early train, after spending the previous evening at Challis's, where he stayed the night.

He paused a moment over knocking the ashes from his meerschaum, and began saying something. But he didn't get as far as a consonant. Then his wife said: "What were you going to say?"

"Don't know whether I ought to tell you this! . . ." said he.

"You must, *now!*"

"Well—you must be very, *very* careful not to repeat it. Challis didn't bind me over, certainly; but I know he meant confidence, all the same."

"I'll be very, very careful. Go on!"

"That old woman—the religious old horror . . ."

"Yorick—*dar*ling!"

"That devout old lady, then! . . . What about her? Why, there's some reason to suppose, apparently, that she never was respectably married at all to the first wife's father. I am speaking of the Deceased Wife's Sister's sister—Marianne's sister. . . ."

"What a horrid old hypocrite! And she making all that rumpus about Marianne 'living in sin'!"

"Yes—but I wasn't thinking about that. . . . Don't you see? . . ."

"Don't I see what?"

"Don't you see that, if it's true, the Deceased Wife's Sister's sister wasn't born in wedlock. So—legally, at any rate—she wasn't her sister at all. Not so much as a half-sister. And she wasn't a Deceased Wife, by hypothesis. Q. E. D. So what was Kate?" Mrs. Athelstan Taylor looked perplexed—evidently thought Kate must have been hard put to it to be there at all.

"Wouldn't Dr. Barham? . . ." she began.

The Rector filled out the question. "What my young friend Bob calls 'make a great ass of himself'?"

"Really, Yorick, he *is* your Bishop! But I suppose that's the sort of thing I meant."

"My dear, he can't!"

"Why not?"

"Because his Creator has anticipated him." The Rector seemed happy over this. His wife did not feel quite certain she understood it. But she was sure it was time to light her candle, and that, broadly speaking, the curtain might fall.

"It *has* been a strange story," said she, in a sort of generally forgiving, conclusive way.

"It *has!*" repeated Athelstan Taylor. "And not a pleasant one! Anyhow, it's one consolation, that it never can happen again."

FINIS

THE AUTHOR TO HIS READERS ONLY

When, to my great surprise, I published four years since a novel called "Joseph Vance," a statement was repeated more than once in some journals that were kind enough to notice it, that its author was seventy years of age. Why this made me feel like a centenarian I do not know, especially as it was five years ahead of the facts. But that was its moral effect. Its practical one was to make me endeavour to set it right. I then learned for the first time how hopeless is the pursuit of an error through the columns of the press, and soon gave up the chase.

But in the course of my attempts to procure the reduction to which I was entitled, I expressed a hope that the said author would live to be seventy, and, further, that he would write four or five volumes as long as his first in the interim. To my thinking, he has been as good (or as bad) as his word, for this present volume is Vol. II. of the fourth story published since then, and the day of its publication will be the author's seventieth birthday; or, if you consider the day of his birth as a birthday, his seventy-first. I see nothing to be ashamed of in the way this author has come to time, and can (so far) look with complacency on the fact that we are each other.*

* The English edition of this book is published in two volumes.

At the risk of more Early Victorianism—I have a heavy score against me!—may I use the rest of this fly-leaf, otherwise blank, to touch on another point? I know that gossiping with one's readers is a disreputable Early Victorian practice, and far from Modern, which everything ought to be. But I will not detain mine long.

I wish to protest against a misinterpretation that readers of fiction will probably continue to make to the end of time, however strongly authors may appeal against it.

I refer to the practice of ascribing views—political, religious, or otherwise—expressed by characters in a book to its author. It is as unreasonable to do so as to impute every opinion spoken in a dream to the dreamer himself. In this foregoing book, as in others, the author has merely put on record what the characters he was dreaming of seemed to him to say.

I repudiate responsibility on his behalf. Hold a writer of pure fiction answerable for the opinions of every one of his dramatis personæ, *and he will be limited in the choice of them to folk who are on all fours with everyone else—conformists of a venomous type—good to be read about in bed by persons who suffer from insomnia, but good for nothing else. Take the words of each character for what they are worth, and if a character alleged by the tale to be sane says something you don't agree with, condemn it as ill-drawn, if you like, but don't call the author to account as if he had ventured to question the validity of your own persuasions. Leave him a free hand, and he will* verser comme si c'était pour soi, *and his books will be infinitely more readable, even if some of his favourite characters utter incorrect opinions.*

I may add that if the readers of this novel want anything altered in it, it shall be done in the second edition, provided that they are unanimous and that it will leave the text consecutive.

W. De Morgan.

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